THE

TWO HUNTERS;

OR,

THE CAÑON CAMP.

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1865
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A ROMANCE OF THE SANTA FÉ TRAIL.

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THE TWO HUNTERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE RED RIVER BIVOUAC

A PARTY of three was gathered about the fire waiting for supper. Things looked comfortable, generally, though not according to the usual order; the fire-place, for instance, being a hole scooped in the sand, the table a cleared spot of ground, and the apartment consisting of a good-sized prairie, with the sky for a ceiling. The night was dark, though full of stars; a light wind floated by, at intervals, just wavering the flames of the dry cottonwood, and bringing them a little too near the fat breast of the wild-turkey browning on its stake. With a soft gurgle and rush, a broad creek, about ten paces to the east, swept by on its way to the Red river, two miles to the north. Against the starry sky were defined the outlines of the Wachita mountains rising darkly in the western horizon.

Of the three who awaited supper, the first was a young man of about twenty-four, with dark hair and beard, sun-browed complexion, and an eye that flashed back the fire-light like an eagle's. The second was a tall, bony, light-haired person, above thirty, and a native of Connecticut. The third member of the party was a dog. It will be saying a good deal for him to mention, that his eye was as keen as his master's, and his nose as inquisitive as the New Englander's.

By his side lay a little pile of "traps," consisting of the knapsacks and extra accouterments, while the rifles of the hunters lay each ready to the hand of its owner.

"Guess what I'm a calculating," proposed the older of the two, with his twinkling blue eye fixed upon the roasting turkey.

"The distance of the nearest Comanches, perhaps?"

"No—bother the Injuns, I warn't thinkin' of them this time. I'm calculating how long that fowl's been a-cookin'."

"About three-quarters of an hour, I suppose."

"Wrong, ag'in, my friend. Three-quarters of an hour's common time. I'm calculating by sensations, and not by minutes or seconds. When a man hasn't eaten any thing but a dry biscuit at five in the mornin', and has trudged a matter of twenty or thirty miles, and it's late in the evenin', and he's tired and hungry, and the drippin's keep falling on the coals, and makin' such a savory smell, I can't measure time by the clock—even if I had one; and, speakin' of clocks, reminds me that I sold my last lot out for ninety-five cents apiece, and then I quit the business. Fact is, people were supplied, and I never like to be in a business that's overdone,—and that's one reason I like huntin' on the Red river. 'Tain't crowded here, jest yet. Wal, then, according to the time-piece in my stomach, (which is an entirely sensational bit of machinery like the magnetic telegraph,) that bird's been thirty-four hours and sixty seconds comin' to the stage of 'done brown'—where it has this minute arriv', or my name ain't Amos."

"Dick agrees with you," said the young man, with a smile, which passed with the brightness and vividness of lightning over his face, as the dog turned his gaze from the turkey to his master, with a look which asked why the fowl was not attended to.

"He beats a French cook all to pieces, that dog does. I'd trust him to cook Thanksgivin' dinner for me, if he only had hands. Hands is all that's lackin' to make a first-class human out of him, though, as for that matter, his paws are more handy than most people's. Did you ever reckon whether or not dogs have *souls?*" continued the speaker, lifting the turkey from the extemporized spit, and depositing it on a tin-plate which the other had taken from the knapsack. "I lectured on that subject once, all through Connecticut. Made quite a sensation, I tell you! Some of the ministers was down on me like leeches on a dropsy subject. They said—have you got the pepper 'n salt there, Louis?—I was going against revelation, but I jist invited the people to pay the quarters, listen to facts, and judge for themselves. If I'd had

Dick there, to take along, and set off my lectures with a few of his tricks, I'd made my everlastin' fortune, sure as my name ain't Moses."

"I don't know about common dogs," said the young man, in his quiet way, "but, I know Dick's got a soul, if I have. There, sir, you shall have your supper at the same time with your master."

The two men were now busy, making use of the long knives which they drew from their belts to cut slices from the fowl, which they ate without the ceremony of forks or plates. Dick got all the bones, and many a savory bit besides. A long day's tramp in the open air was the sauce which gave keenest relish to the repast, yet the hackneyed appetite of a city gourmand would have been tickled by the flavor of the delicious fowl—young, tender, roasted before hot coals, stuffed with bread, salt, pepper, bits of salt pork, and pecan-nuts, and possessing all the peculiar aroma of the wild bird. The cold water of the creek, which had nothing of the sulphurous taste peculiar to the streams of the Wachita country, served for drink, and a couple of large leaves twisted into cups, were full of berries that had been gathered from the surrounding grass.

"How do you like the stuffing, Louis?"

"Very much. Where did you learn to stuff fowls in this style?"

"B'longed to the ornithological department of a museum once. Kept a hotel, too, down to the sea-shore. I say, Louis, them Comanches was on the war-path whose trail we crossed this afternoon. They've been kicking up a quarrel with the Kioways, I reckon."

"What makes you think they were on the war-path, Buell?"

"Think? I don't think—I know. You're a right smart hunter, Louis, for a feller that's only been out of civilization for a matter of six months or a year—but you've got lots to learn yet."

"I'm under an excellent teacher," said the young man, good humoredly.

"That's so! There's only one chap on these plains that I'll knuckle in to, and that's John Bushman, and he's an

Injun. Of course he is a *leetle* more of an Injun than I am, but, not much—and there's one thing I am that he ain't, and that's a Yankee. So I'm a leetle more'n even with him; though I'm free to say he's a good guide, and a hunter that I have a respect for. They was Comanches, I could tell by the holes which they dug for their fires; they allus make them fifteen inches across. They was a war or a huntin' party, because they didn't have their tent-poles along. Now, I dug this hole for our fire in exact imitation of theirs; bekase, you see, if they should happen along here, after we've left, they won't know white folks are around. Ef you'd only step straight, Louis, and not turn your toes out so, like a civilized human, and foller my directions ginerally as to sleepin' and walkin', and so on, they wouldn't know our tracks from their own."

"Do you think they'd quarrel with us, if they met us?"

"Wal, mebbe they would, and mebbe they wouldn't—'twould be accordin' to the humor. If any rascally white trader should have been cheatin' them lately, or silly hunter been trippin' 'em, they'll be ugly enough. I never cheat an Injun, if I can help it—and that's the reason I don't want to trade with 'em; for, you see, when I trade, I like to make a good bargain. It goes ag'in' my conscience to trade quite even—but as I say, I don't like to cheat an Injun, for fear he'll come up with me some day. That's what put me out of conceit of the fur business. I was two winters up among the Sioux, buying furs, but, we didn't hitch very even, bekase they were all-fired sharp, and of course I hed to be a leetle sharper, and they got mad, and I quit business with 'em. I say, Louis, I reckon we've been a little risky to let our fire blaze up so. We'd better cover it down, so's 'twon't show, but just smolder away enough to keep our feet warm while we're asleep. There's one thing we've got to do, soon; and that's to get a couple of horses from somewhere. I don't like this bein' on foot in case of a race with the Comanches. They owe us two; for I make no doubt 'twas them stole ours the other night. *You* think they wandered away, but I don't."

"I think so, because I don't believe Dick would have permitted any living creature, no matter if his feet were shod with velvet, to creep up and drive them off—would you, Dick?"

Dick looked up in his master's face as if he resented even the question; then turned, with the countenance of injured innocence to the other party, and gave a short bark of reproach.

"You may lay me in the lie if you want to, Dick; but I tell you, you overslept yourself for once—the Comanches stole them horses."

The dog said no more, whatever he may have thought, for his powers of speech were not equal to an argument with Amos Buell; he returned to the bone from which his attention had been diverted, while the two travelers, with the cravings of appetite fully satisfied, leaned on their elbows, and stretched their feet to the fire.

The eyes of the younger were fixed on the stars with a lost and dreamy expression, which made his companion very uneasy. Silence was hateful to the Yankee, and a secret was a thing not to be kept in his company. After a few moments deep observation of his companion, who had apparently forgotten his existence in some dream of the past or future, he broke forth:

"I say, Louis, you've got suthin' on your mind."

"Well?" queried the other, slowly withdrawing his gaze from the brilliant heavens, and fixing it on the speaker.

"I'd like to know what 'tis, if you've no objections. When those spells of thinking come over you, you're quite a different person from what you are when on the hunt, or most other occasions. I'll bet you the two horses we're goin' to find in a day or two, that you've been in some sort of a scrape some time, and have run away from yer friends. Oh, you needn't git mad, Louis; you and me is too good friends to take offense easy, and I don't mean to insinuate it's been any thing bad on your part. Mebbe it's a gal been playin' the deuce with you, eh?"—and the twinkling eyes shot a rapid glance into the handsome face, which had suddenly put on a moody expression, rendered still more striking by the fitful play of the expiring firelight.

"You presume too much on our friendship," was his cold remark.

"Shouldn't wonder," was the reply, with characteristic *sangfroid*. "It's one o' my failings—askin' questions is.

But if we didn't inquire, we wouldn't know any thing. I never intend to get lost on account of backwardness in asking the road. Besides, I have told you my history, without bashfulness, and I'd like you to return the compliment. You're a smart chap, of good family, and have got an eddication quite different from our out-west hunters. I don't feel a bit sleepy yet, and if you've a mind to gratify my curiosity, by tellin' me exactly what brought you out to the Red river country, I'd listen with as much pleasure as the folks used to, to me when I went about lecturing."

"Supposing I'd say I came for my health"—and with this brief rejoinder, the young man adjusted his kit in such a way as to serve for a pillow, gave a word of warning to his dog to keep strict watch, and with his rifle in reach of his hand, closed his eyes, affecting to be asleep. As there was no more "talk" to be got out of him that evening, Buell concluded to follow his example, and having covered down the bed of coals, he, too, stretched himself out, and was soon sunk in such slumber as is only enjoyed in the open air, and when won by healthy fatigue.

CHAPTER II.

"WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOR?" SAID THE SPIDER, ETC.

ALTHOUGH the young hunter was so reticent, when his companion referred to his past history, it is not incumbent on us to be the same. A few years prior to the opening scene, Louis Grason was a great favorite in certain good circles of New York society. He was an only son—good-looking, and had qualities of head and heart which promised to make more than an ordinary man of him. He could be gracefully devoted to the young ladies, and converse sensibly with the old gentlemen; he was cheerful, intelligent, ambitious, with just enough fire of temper, and ardor of purpose, to give him a manner of his own. Everybody liked him. It may be that even Flora McFlimsey would have married him, if he had offered himself to her; for, although his family was but moderately

wealthy—"ridiculously rich," according to the later standard of shoddy and petroleum—it was an *old* family, whose traditions reached back to the earliest Knickerbockers.

The old house was quietly massive, as was the old plate, and the old furniture; and the old pictures grew darker, year by year, in their solid frames. There were solid old books, too, in the library; and Louis' father was a solid old gentleman, and his mother as true a lady as the ring of the old teapot was true silver; so that, altogether, the young man's associations were of the best, and he did credit to them, as most sons of *such* parents do.

When Louis was about twenty-two, and before his heart had bowed at any of the fair shrines erected in the spacious parlors of his New York acquaintances, his father sent him on business, one winter, to St. Louis. The business was not arduous, being simply the collection of some debts; and there were relatives in that charmingly hospitable city who welcomed the young man warmly, and would not permit him to return before he had spent the greater part of the gay season with them.

He was not hard to persuade, for he was fascinated by the mingled southern and western grace and cordiality of the society into which he was introduced. It was pleasant to feel himself a favorite; while nothing could be more delightful, at least for a time, than the house of the uncle with whom he made his home. The style of living was gay and generous; and two pretty and brilliant daughters made constant sunshine. The feeling of admiration and affection was mutual between the cousins, but it was a cousinly sentiment, which went no further. The girls were proud of Louis, and found him conveniently disposable for concerts, theaters and balls; and he did not fret at the duty of attending upon two such well-dressed and spirited young ladies.

So the winter fled; and it was at one of the last and largest of the private balls that Louis Grason finally met his fate. The ball was given by a rich widow of St. Louis, in honor of the arrival at her house of a niece from New Orleans, who had come up the river to stay a few weeks with her. None of the Grasons had met her until the evening of the party; for, when the ladies called, the aunt and her guest had chanced

to be out. All were surprised, and, in a manner, overpowered by the beauty of Miss Mora. But the full force of her charms fell upon the heart of the young Northerner, which had slept in his breast like a ripe red rose-bud waiting for the first sun-ray of love to burst it into full flower. Doubtless, the contrast in her style of dress, movement and features, to the fairer and more reserved loveliness to which he had been accustomed, enhanced the effect. Yet, that he was not alone in his admiration, was proven by the subdued murmur which followed wherever she moved—the charmed attention which hung upon all she did or said. The rumor which filled the rooms, that she was heiress to immense wealth, deepened the impression made by her beauty upon all save Louis, who was too suddenly filled with her youth and loveliness to be capable of the grosser sensations of lucre and pride of circumstance.

Miss Mora looked small as she stood beside her aunt, who was a portly woman. Her form was slender, exquisitely molded; her hair purple-black; her complexion dark, smooth and fine; her eyes black and changeful. Even the women felt an inclination to touch with their finger-tips the lovely shoulders, and crimson-veined cheeks, to find if they were as velvet-soft as they appeared, so rich and fine was the texture of the clear skin. She was so youthful that her smile was that of a child—innocent and irrepressible—flashing sweetly over her face, when any trifle pleased her; but her eyes had the deeper light of womanhood. What eyes were those, sleeping in the shadow of their black lashes, ready, any instant, to flash out into dangerous brightness!

Her dress was of richer material and color than would have been worn by a northern maiden of the same age, but it harmonized with her beauty. She wore something crystalline and floating over a crimson silk, and the flash of rubies was perceptible in her hair and drapery, whenever she stirred. Trails of crimson flowers contrasted vividly with her black braids, and lay against the softness of her neck. The same blossoms caught up the silver sheen of gauze over the heavy skirt, which gave an effect like the fire of opals glimmering through their milkiness.

But all this description does not and can not give an idea of Mariquita Mora; for her smile, the tone of her voice, the

flash of her eye, are indescribable—and these made a great part of her charm. Ten minutes in her society effected a marvelous change in the young New-Yorker. He, hitherto, had the credit of possessing more pride than passion. His cousins smiled as they observed him, and when, later in the evening, they playfully rallied him on his too-evident admiration, he did not seek to deny the impeachment, but answered them with a half-angry earnestness which silenced them. All through the crowded and brilliant night he hovered about the star of the occasion, a most devoted moth. He was rewarded and sent home deliriously happy, by a look and smile from Miss Mora, which told him that she had singled him out for, at least, that evening, as deserving special liking.

The opportunity given him, during the complimentary call of the succeeding day, for improving the acquaintance, was not neglected. The aunt cordially pressed him to visit them without ceremony, during the brief visit of her niece, whom she benevolently desired should enjoy herself, and not pine for her brilliant southern home.

Louis knew too much of the world not to perfectly understand that the aunt wished to assure him that he was an eligible *parti*, who might feel himself at liberty to be devoted, if he was inclined; but for this he only felt grateful. How was it possible she could think *any one* worthy to approach that incomparable niece? Had he ever suspected her of deliberate match-making, he would not have been the less flattered, nor have laid any of the charge to the thought of the young lady —she, who was too young and too guileless to have any comprehension of her aunt's motives—any feelings which were not those of an innocent child, or an angel! So he expressed his pleasure at being permitted to attempt to amuse Miss Mora—his hope that home-sickness would not cause her to abridge her visit, etc., and immediately began a series of daily calls and attentions.

In the mean time, a feeling of uneasiness crept into the family of his relatives. For the first time, they wanted the dear boy safely at home, and regretted that they had urged his stay with them. Curious stories began to float about, intangibly, in the atmosphere. They could scarcely be traced, but their *power* was felt, and an air of painful mystery began

to wrap Miss Mora, "felt, not seen." The warmth of her first welcome grew colder among the visitors at her aunt's house.

It was rumored that her mother was not the "right kind of a woman." It was asserted that Madame Mora was a Spanish woman, who, in her youth, had been extremely beautiful—as beautiful as her daughter; that she had come to New Orleans, almost fabulously wealthy, after the death of a first husband in Spain, and had married an amiable Creole gentleman, whom she had soon worried into the grave—if, indeed, she had not sent him there by still more dubious means; that her house—which the best people of New Orleans avoided—was a perfect Spanish Inquisition, whose victims were her colored people; that she had rooms and instruments of torture, where her slaves were "punished"—not for their faults, but at the instigation of her caprice—even unto death; that, so great was the terror in which her servants held her, they dared not complain to the authorities, who would be slow to espouse their cause against that of the rich Madame, while, in the mean time, the slightest sign of revolt on their part would be followed by such tortures as awed the boldest into abject silence. It was vaguely whispered that the bones of more than one poor slave rested from suffering in those lovely gardens, the perfumes of whose rare flowers floated over all that part of the city; and that her extensive cellars held more than one skeleton.*

Out of such a home as this she had sent her daughter—knowing that her chances for marriage in New Orleans were so very small—to this northern relative, in the expectation that her beauty and wealth would speedily win her a husband, before any rumor of her parentage should obscure her prospects.

These were some of the dark and chilly shadows which began to gather about the beautiful stranger. People thronged

* Any dweller in New Orleans, during the years 1850-54, will recognize in this character that of a woman of wealth, whose enormity of cruelty to her slaves rendered her so odious, even to that community of slave-traders, as to excite public horror at her acts. She was not punished, however, for her numberless murders of servants in the awful dungeons of her city residence, but was permitted to quietly leave the country. With a number of her slaves, she went to Cuba, where the monster may yet be living—an example of the *right* of every owner to "whip his own niggers."

the house of the aunt, but it was to feed their savage curiosity upon the fair girl—to look in her black eyes for some gleam which should betray the inherited cruelty—to watch her graceful, coquettish movements for some motions of the maternal wantonness—to gaze at the small hands and speculate how many thumb-screws and joint-stretchers they had assisted to fasten; and, above all, to note if the good aunt was likely to prove successful in her noted match-making project. That she *was* only too likely to succeed, and that the young New Yorker was, undoubtedly, the unhappy victim, grew to be the universal opinion. There was, consequently, a high state of subdued excitement in the circle interested.

This was the cause of the uneasiness in the Grason family. Mrs. Grason felt as if she were personally responsible to her brother and sister in New York for what should befall their beloved only son during his sojourn with her. Anxiety for his welfare prompted her to make every inquiry, to sift the dust of scandal, to trace the eddying whirls of rumor, and to decide for herself as to how much truth there was in the wild, shuddering gossip so freely afloat. Improbable as the stories were in their nature, she satisfied herself that they were founded in fact—perhaps not even exaggerated. Then she felt that it was time to lay the matter before her nephew; and she did so, as gently and discreetly as possible. His mingled anger and astonishment were enough to shock a weaker woman into hysterics; but she stood her ground firmly, compelling him to listen, and warning him, as his own mother might have done.

He laughed the possibility of the truth of such scandal to scorn. He sneered at her for giving it enough weight to repeat it.

"You are too late, aunt," he cried, rising and pacing the floor before her. Mariquita and I are already betrothed. "Last night she promised to be mine," and a glow of exultation broke through his vexed expression.

"Yet you have known her but three weeks! Is not this haste, on her part, proof of at least considerable eagerness?"

"Beware, aunt! even you must not say that! Unmaidenly! I wish you could have seen her blush—it was an angel's! *I* have loved her since the first time of our meeting; I could not love her more, were we to wait to all eternity for love to

grow. Then why should *she* not also be capable of returning the feeling instantly? It is but a proof that we were made for each other—my sweetest proof. Why should she hesitate and affect doubt? She does not donbt me any more than I do her. My family, my position, my reputation and prospects are all known to her. There is no reason for delay."

"I wish hers were as well known to you," sighed his aunt.

"I know them well enough. Her family is rich and respectable; she has the blood of the Spanish nobility in her veins. But, even if she had not, Mariquita would be the same to us, aunt Grason. Yes! if her mother were all that you represent her—if her mother and aunt *had* conspired to betray me into the match—it would not make a breath of difference in my estimation of that dear child. *She* is pure; she is good and artless. If her mother is a devil, it is all the more reason why I should remove her from so baleful an influence."

"You are mad, Louis, to talk that way. I thought you were a staunch believer in hereditary faults and virtues—in family influence—in the characteristics of blood. And even if Miss Mora's mother should prove to be a decent woman, what do you think you will do with such a mother's tropical butterfly, as your chosen bride, in *your* mother's quiet, well-ordered home. Will not all their tastes, habits, and views be of the most opposite kind? Will it not be hard for your mother to bear with such a brilliant intruder—this southern girl, with her careless, indolent southern habits? You are an only son, Louis, and you ought to reflect upon these things."

"You mean well, aunt, but you don't understand Mariquita or me. Don't be troubled about my dear mother. I feel in my heart that she will love my wife. I am going to write to her, this very day, to prepare her house and heart for the sweetest, brightest, most lovable daughter that ever a proud and happy son brought home.

Nothing further could be done by the relatives but to allow matters to take their course. They hoped for the best, that Mariquita, being so young, was not yet corrupted by her mother's example; and that her removal to an entirely different sphere, under the roof of so judicious a person as Mrs. Grason, might have a saving influence.

Still, they could not be reconciled to the haste of the wedding. They understood that Louis desired to take his bride home with him in May, and that she had consented to his wish. In this haste, they were certain they saw the influence of the match-making aunt.

Since the affair had gone so far, they were willing to use their influence to dispel the unpleasant rumors afloat. They called on the bride-elect to congratulate her, and to consult with the aunt about the details of the wedding. The cousins declared to their mother that they liked Mariquita, and did not believe there was any thing bad about her.

"You know she told us, mamma. that she had been educated in a convent, and had only been home some six weeks in as many years."

"That may be one of her stories," was the suspicious reply. "Doubtless she fears we may have heard something, and is laboring to give us to understand that *she* is all right. Her eyes are wicked—I can not trust them. But they are very beautiful—I do not wonder they have bewitched your cousin!"

"Do you consent that we shall be bridemaids, mamma?"

"For Louis' sake—yes. But I don't feel happy about it."

Thereafter, there was a constant flutter in the house. Louis was like one half lost in a dream of delight, caring for none of the details, only waiting for the day when Mariquita should become his wife. But his gay cousins were all excitement over discussions of wedding-dresses, wedding-cards, wedding-presents.

However—the wedding never took place.

One soft April twilight, Louis Grason strolled along one of the wide, pleasant avenues which make the suburbs of St. Louis so delightful. Already, in that earlier climate, the gardens were sweet with flowers, and the handsome houses looked out upon the broad road through curtains of roses that filled the evening air with delicious odors. Happy as one who walks in Paradise, he rambled on, thinking of Mariquita, and of coming May, when he became aware that he knew one of two persons who had emerged into the avenue from a side street, and were walking rapidly in advance of him.

Yes, one of them was Mariquita. The twilight was deepening, but he could not be mistaken. She had worn that lilac-silk mantle when walking with him the day before. He saw her black braids beneath her little coquettish hat, and once, as he hurried forward, so as to approach nearer, he heard her cough. But who was she out with ?—and what for, at this hour, and so far from her aunt's house ? Her companion was a young man, slender, dark, southern-looking, well dressed, and of haughty, graceful carriage ; a stranger to St. Louis. Mariquita hung on his arm in the most confiding manner, turning her face up to his, laughing and chatting with the utmost gayety and freedom. A new sensation tingled through the lover's breast —a fierce pang of jealousy. His betrothed had no male relations—no male friends, in the city, sufficiently intimate to make it at all proper that she should thus cling to him, and be so affectionately gay. He followed on, his thoughts growing every moment more confused, his heart raging within him, and yet not really comprehending what was before his eyes.

Unconscious of pursuit, the couple hurried forward, until they were far out, almost beyond the range of city dwellings and gardens. Louis kept pace with them. Finally they entered a little summer resort, where ice-cream and cake could be procured, for those who were weary with promenading the pleasant avenue. It was a perfectly respectable place, to which Louis had been with his cousins. But that *she* should go there with this stranger ! He lurked under the trees until they came forth. The light of lamps was full on their faces as they descended the steps. There could be no mistake as to its being Mariquita. How prettily she looked up to the face of her graceful companion ! But now her mood had changed, a tear dropped on her cheek, she was sad, drooping. They paused, close under the shadow of the tree, from the other side of which Louis was watching them.

There was a rustic bench which half-encircled the trunk, and upon this they seated themselves. For an instant pride struggled with Louis against listening to their conversation ; but, he felt that he had a *right* to know why Mariquita was there, and in that company ; and even had he felt otherwise, it is a question if he could have controlled the fierce emotions

which mastered him, sufficiently to have turned and left the spot.

"Now, little Mariquita, in five minutes we must part."

"Ah, Pedro, how can I endure to let you go!"

"It's very hard, I know, pretty one. We love each other well. But I have already incurred dangers in seeking this interview. And, just think, Mariquita, not dangers only, but what trouble and expense, all for one stolen meeting with my little girl!" and he laughed pleasantly. "You think that lover of yours, whom you are going to marry, a very devoted adorer; but I'd risk my head that he wonldn't come all the way from Santa Fé just for an hour or two with you. Think of the thousands of miles, the hundreds of dollars, the uncomfortable traveling, and the Comanches!"

"Ah, Pedro," she answered, laughing a little, too, in echo of his own half-bantering, half-earnest tone, "don't pretend it was all for my sake. Hain't you just been telling me that you had important business—that your mining interests required a visit to the States? I wish you'd sell out these provoking mines, Pedro, and come to New York and live. That will be my home, you know, and mother will not annoy you there. We could be free from those unhappy influences, Pedro, and enjoy each other's society as we ought."

Her voice trembled, making Louis, as he leaned and listened, clutch at the handle of the knife, which he had already learned, since his sojourn in the city, to carry.

"I don't think I could be contented in the North, Mariquita. It is too cold and methodical for me. I like warm skies and hearts of fire. We don't stand very much upon ceremony at Santa Fé, my sweet; and, although there is less variety, less news of the world than I desire, yet, if I had but *you* there, I fancy I should be satisfied to remain there."

"You'll soon find some one to fill my place, Pedro. Some one of those handsome Mexican girls will make you a fine wife, and then you will not need me."

"*Quien sabe?*" said the other, gayly. "Now, darling, I will hurry back with you, until we meet a carriage, when I will place you in it, and send you home. It is too late for you to be out alone, and you know I do not care to be seen with you, so I shall not venture near your aunt's. Besides, I fear you

keep that lover waiting Give him my compliments, if you dare. It'll all be right some day, and then I shall meet him. Well, we must go"—they rose, pausing a moment, while Louis heard Mariquita sob. "It is hard to part. Give me a kiss, little girl."

Their lips met under the shadows. There was murder in the heart of Louis. The knife leaped from its hiding-place; had he been of Southern birth, no doubt it would have done its work of blood, but some powerful influence of a life-long training, drew back his hand, and the couple walked away unharmed.

That night, Louis Grason, wandering aimless about the streets and wharves of St. Louis, heard the ringing of a steamer-bell, and just as the plank was being drawn in, sprung aboard, and found himself on the way to the little capital of Nebraska Territory. After a tedious interval, that seemed to him all dark and broken, like the delusion of a fever, he arrived at the little frontier settlement. Should he rest there? The desire to keep stirring was resistless, while the wild and new life around him filled his heart with a new desire—that for adventure, excitement, peril, suffering—such a desire as, in more civilized communities, vents itself in the wild excesses of dissipation or suicide. Before him lay the boundless plains, with their limitless hills, valleys, rivers and wastes—with their myriads of buffalo and antelope—with their half-dozen tribes of savages, who lurked by the wayside to slay every intruder upon their domains. Behind him lay a life which he would forget, if possible. Should he hesitate?

A party of hunters, speculators and adventurers, were about to start, overland, for an expedition into the heart of the country. He bought a rifle, a belt-revolver, a traveling-bag, and a good horse, and joined the party with their hearty assent. His reckless courage, his forced gayety, made him the best man of the company. As for him, it was a sweet relief from the thought of having found the woman he loved false, to bound away over the prairies, or to mingle in the excitement of the chase. He hunted buffalo, bears, or Comanches—it mattered little which. He made good friends with the hardy hunters, and found a dog which loved and served him with more than human fidelity.

And so it chanced that, after about a year of adventure, he found himself, with his dog and Amos Buell, quite far away even from the ordinary track of western adventurers, following new fields along the course of the Red river, dreaming his still sad dreams under the shadow of the bold Wachita mountains.

It is not strange that he shrunk from relating a history like this to the coarse and curious ear of his Yankee companion. What influence had drawn his steps in that direction he did not care to acknowledge even to himself. It was on the road to Santa Fé—that is on the Red river trail thither, for nothing like a well-traveled road was to be found in these wild and dangerous regions.

But why Santa Fé? The name burned into his brain, and seemed ever glowing before his eyes in letters of fire! It was the home of "Pedro"—that half-seen and half-named person who had arisen on his path, so unexpectedly, blighting present and future in a few brief moments. What did he want of Pedro? Nothing! He had no call to revenge himself upon the man—this man, who had been *her* lover, before he knew of her existence; it was the woman who was to blame. And should he meet the Spaniard, would he not kill him? Why, then, did he take the route which led toward his victim?

In misery and inconsistency he dwelt, allowing "his fate," as he secretly called it, to draw him toward—he knew not what.

Surely he had enough to dream about, as he lay on the wind-swept prairie, looking up at the large southern stars. What had Mariquita thought of his sudden, unexplained absence, and how had it affected her? What did his friends believe had been his fate? He knew they believed him to have been murdered in St. Louis, and thrown in the river, for he chanced upon a paragraph to that effect in a newspaper which came in his way. One thing gave him great trouble—the distress of his parents. To mitigate this, he had written to them, explaining that his belief that he had loved unworthily, was making a wanderer of him for the present, but that he would some time return to them, when "cured of his malady,"

a wiser and a nobler man for his folly and his suffering. He lay, now, wondering if they ever received that letter, mailed as it was at a far out-lying military post—thinking of Madam Mora, that incredible, exceptional woman, or fiend—recalling the wild stories which he had smiled at in incredulous scorn, until, in a moment, all became confirmed in his belief—that moment in which the truth of Mariquita grew a *lie* to him.

In the midst of all his reveries, never did it come into his mind to put any other construction upon the girl's conduct, than the first, most natural one, which his jealousy had made.

CHAPTER III.

HUNTING AND HUNTED.

Several hours of intense silence and repose followed the disposal of the two hunters to their night's rest, when it was broken by the dog pushing his cold nose softly into Louis' face. Awaking instantly, and with every faculty on the alert, he became aware of distant noises and a vibratory motion of the earth. It took him but a moment to decide that both were caused by the rapid approach of a large number of horses. That these were not a wild brood, but under the guidance of the rein, he inferred from a certain regularity in their gait, differing from the thunder of the untamed drove, and not resembling the confused, continuous, tremulous roll of the buffalo herd. Raising his head a little, he looked about him. It was three o'clock, or earlier, of a June morning; already a rosy flush brightened in the east, and the coming dawn was paling the stars with its stronger light. Not more than the eighth of a mile away, a band of Indians were riding rapidly, and apparently directly toward the hunters' grassy couch. They might number thirty. Pressing down the head of his dog, and bidding him be silent, Louis shook his companion by the shoulder. With the long instinct of habit, Amos awoke as silently and suddenly as the young man himself had done.

"Keep low—keep shady, Louis; they 're Comanches, and

a war party, at that," whispered the Yankee, without a movement of his body except a slight elevation of his head. "What the mischief be they eout for, at this time o' mornin'? Cre-acky! here they be, right on us! No, they ain't; they've tuk to that path t'other side the creek. Keep quiet, my boy. Don't show your head over the grass. It's lucky for us it's high enough to kiver us."

"There are two white persons with them, who seem to be prisoners," eagerly exclaimed the younger man.

"Hush! so they be. And, Louis, there's our horses! Didn't I tell ye? What you got to say, neow, about that dog o' yourn? I know them red rascals by heart; they'd steal a horse when you was a settin' on him, and you'd never know it till they was out o' sight!"

"I've a mind to try my rifle on one or two of them."

"That *would* be sensible, wouldn't it, neow? They'd hav' our scalps in less'n three minits, and we *wouldn't* hav' our horses. No, my boy, keep shady—here they come!"

Men and dog crouched in the long grass, as the fierce party swept by, at a distance of about fifty yards. The gray light of the dim dawn favored the hunters, who remained undiscovered, while having a "good look" at the ferocious thieves who had so cunningly abstracted their horses some two or three nights previous.

Suddenly Louis raised himself on his elbow; in his excitement he would have sprung to his feet, had not his friend held him down.

"It's a woman!" he gasped.

"Yes, yes, I see that. But, don't get excited if it is. Now that I've took a closer look, I don't think they're prisoners. 'Pear to me like travelers who have hired the Comanches to escort 'em to the nearest post or settlement."

"But, who travels in this region—especially what woman would be likely to put herself under *such* protection?" asked the young man, gazing after the retreating forms with a startled, restless expression.

"'Tain't a common occurrence, that's certain; still, the Mexicaners do cross the country—the men quite often—and these people may have had an errand. It is quite common to hire the Injuns, when they're tol'ably peaceable, for guides;

though that party *was* rather strong, for the purpose. Come to think of it, them red-skins was Wachitas, and they've been hired by them whites to protect 'em from the Comanches. The Wachitas is friendly—but they're powerful on stealin'. They can beat the Comanches at that game, though they ain't half as brave warriors. The whites were Mexicans, I should say. Give us your guess."

"They were dressed like Mexicans, and were of darker complexion than ourselves. Did you see the woman's face, Buell?"

"She looked to me like a young gal; but I wouldn't swar' to it, in this light."

"Her hair was long and black, and she was small," continued the other, more as if talking to himself than his companion.

"Like as not; I was taking more particular notice of her companion. He rode his horse splendidly; never saw any thing nicer."

"Was he young, too, and slender, with a black mustache?" asked Louis, so earnestly that his friend laughed.

"I s'pose he must have been young and tall, by the grace with which he managed that critter; but I didn't have time to take an inventory. What's the matter with you, Louis? You look as if you'd been struck, or had the colic, powerful."

"Do you think we could keep up with them—overtake them?" was the reply, as Louis stood up, and looked after the retreating party.

"Do use common prudence," exclaimed Buell, jerking him down. If you want to git your horse back, *that* ain't the way to do it. Lay low, till they're clean out o' sight, and then we'll take the trail. Of course, I don't exactly see how it's to be done, seein' they're mounted and we're on foot, but, I'm bound to fetch up with 'em sooner or later. If I don't git back them animals, I'll sell out and take the back track for the States. I ain't going to be fooled by all the Wachitas in this territory. And, sence its them has got our horses I feel quite easy in my mind. Their principal village ain't a hundred miles from here. They know me; I've been there. These fellows are going in the right direction. They'll take a rest in that village, and we'll overtake 'em there. If they won't give

up the beasts, we'll lay around till we get a chance to steal 'em back again. I'm powerful on that game when it's *got* to be done."

"But, suppose they shouldn't be going there, after all? Buell, I'd give a thousand dollars—five thousand, this moment—if I was mounted, so that I could follow that party!"

"Pity I hadn't an animal to sell you," remarked the Yankee, with his peculiar sharp look. "I'd like to take you up on that offer, right well. It hurts me awful to lose such a chance of makin' a good bargain. But, what's up, my friend? 'Pears to me you're onduly excited by the sight of that petticoat. I never knew you had a weakness for the fair sect. It might do fur chaps like me, who hasn't any thing else to do; but its kinder strange in you."

"Of course I couldn't be sure, in the dim light," said Louis, "but, I thought I had seen the couple before. No doubt it was a fancy. It *must* have been! it *must* have been," he repeated to himself. "Yes, Buell," with a short laugh, "I've made a fool of myself by imagining I knew them—as if *they* could be here! as if *he* could!" and again he was relapsing into soliloquy, when he shook off, by an effort, the feeling that disturbed him, adding, more naturally:

"I don't care for the white people so much, Buell, but I'd like to get my horse back, now that I've had a glimpse of him. Let's do our best at overtaking them. I'm ready for a start, this instant."

"I ain't," was the cool response. "I'm going to blow up these coals, and warm up this coffee, before I stir a step. A good breakfast is a savin' of time—and I'm in a powerful hurry."

So saying, he proceeded to prepare the coffee in a manner which seemed to his restless companion purposely intended to provoke him by its lazy deliberateness. In the mean time, the mounted party, which had produced such an excitement in our little group, grew less and less distinct across the level distance, and finally disappeared entirely around a spur of the mountains which stood out on the prairie. When his strained gaze could no longer detect a sign of them, Louis began striding back and forth along the bank of the creek, throwing impatient glances at the imperturbable Buell, who kept one eye on

the breakfast and one on the young man, inwardly wondering, with all the fervor of his Connecticut curiosity, "what *was* up" with his usually pleasant companion.

"You're a-wastin' ammunition awfully," he called out at last. "You'll hev' enough walkin' to do before night, without takin' that furious exercise in advance. When I was Professor of Hygiene in a Water-Cure establishment down to hum, I used to recommend just that sort o' walkin' before an 'arly breakfast; but, 'circumstances alter cases,' and I'd advise you, young man, to hold your horses. Howsumever, things are b'ilin' and you're perlitely invited to set to."

Louis came up and took his tin-cup of hot coffee, standing; but his friend remained stretched at ease upon the grass, diversifying the rather limited bill of fare with plenty of grumbling.

"'Tain't fair to hurry a fellow so's he can't prepare a decent meal. I was lottin' on killin' a young deer for breakfast, if them plaguy Wachitas hadn't put us in such a hurry. I don't fancy dried buffalo, when there's plenty o' fresh meat about—do you, Dick?—and what's left o' that turkey ain't worth pickin', even by a dog. I tell you, my young friend, as I used to say at revivals, there's no use o' bilin' clean over, for it puts the fire out *in*tirely. The cooler you take it the quicker you'll get to your journey's end. You've eat nothin' but a cracker, and the consequence will be, you'll give out before we've marched fifteen miles. I'm in for a fifty-mile stretch without a wink o' sleep, but you're goin' to peg out afore we git to the half-way house."

Thus he kept up a running fire of remarks, which did not interfere at all with the huge mouthfuls of jerked meat and hard biscuit, of which he rapidly disposed, his comrade making no reply, and not hearing half he said.

It is not strange that the young hunter was feverish and excited. In the midst of that wild cavalcade, sweeping past him in the weird dim light of early dawn, on that far-off southern prairie, so far from every vestige of his former life, he had seen a woman, so like Mariquita, that, at the time of her passing, he could have sworn it was her. So swiftly, so unexpectedly came the vision, sweeping down upon him, as he started from his dreams—for so brief a time was she near

enough for him to be at all certain of the resemblance—so incredible did it seem to his second thought that it *could* be her—that, scarcely was the band fairly beyond him, than he began to doubt the impression which at first had been positive.

When the troop was approaching him, his attention had become too eagerly fixed upon the woman for him to give a glance at her companion, until after they had passed. Then, looking, in a deep dread and fear that it was *him*, he recalled the form which he had seen, first, as now, from behind: it was the same!—the graceful, erect shoulders, the haughty head, the straight black hair.

"Queer! what's got into him! If the sight of a band of Injuns can upset him like that, he ain't the man I took him for. Pshaw! that can't be it. Never see a cooler head in danger than his is. If 'twan't too improbable I should say them petticoats had something to do with it. Thought they resembled acquaintances of his'n—hum! But them were Mexicans—and he's never been further south than this. He's mighty stubborn about keepin' his own counsel; but I'll worm it out of him as certain as my name's Buell. Well, Louis, if you're ready for a start, I am."

They shouldered their rifles, and, with their light kit suspended at their backs, took up their march in the direction taken by the mounted party. It was no credit to Dick that, running in advance, he kept the trail so well. The merest tyro of a dog or hunter could have done as much without difficulty, for the grass was well cut up by the hoofs of so many animals. In addition, Amos Buell had been over the route once before, in the preceding year, when he made the visit to the village of the Wachitas, which he mentioned. They were but little more than thirty-five miles from that village, which was situated on Rush Creek; it being his opinion that the band of Indians they had seen, if hired to convey the white travelers along the route, would pause, for at least one night, as well as the remainder of the day, at these lodges, the Yankee did not feel so very uneasy about overtaking them. A tramp of a couple of hours brought them around the hill which stood out, like an advance guard, on the prairies. Between the indentations of this, they passed into a lovely, fertile valley, watered by a clear stream, along whose banks

grew trees of considerable size. Keeping upon the margin of this, the day and the scene were so pleasant that, had Louis been less preoccupied, he would have been enthusiastic in his delight. As it was, he seemed only to think of making good time. They had passed over many miles of this beautiful region, and the sun had climbed high in the heavens, when they entered a little grove of pecan trees, which rose high above their heads, and threw welcome shadows over them. The creek, falling over rocks near by, made liquid notes in harmony with the place. It was evident that the Indians had had the good taste to pause here for breakfast, as the remains of their fire were still smoldering near the bank.

"We'll take our dinner in the same spot," remarked Buell, coming to a halt. "You brisk up the fire a little, Louis, and we'll have some br'iled venison for the first course. I'll just go off a short distance, where it's more quiet, and use the bleat. I'll soon call up a doe, for deer's plenty in this valley."

"But it will take so much time," remarked the other.

"Look a-here, I'm an older hunter than you, and you'd better take my advice. 'The more haste, the worse speed.' You look fagged a'ready, while I'm as bright as a button. I calculate to stop here jist two hours; so you can make yourself comfortable. All I feel troubled about is the necessity of killin' my venison by using a bleat. It's a mighty *mean* way o' doin', that's a fact—and I never resort to it unless I'm in too much of a hurry for a reg'lar hunt. Jest you keep up the coals to the br'ilin' p'int, and have some water b'iled for the coffee, and I'll be back in half an hour," and with long strides the Yankee made off silently through the woods, and was soon out of sight of his companion.

Louis obeyed orders, so far as to rekindle the fire, and keep it fed with dry wood; and when it finally promised a fine bed of coals, he set the coffee-pot near, and withdrew to the shadow of a large tree, which hung over the water, just where the ripples, eddying over rocks, made the loudest music. It was a place to dream in; and in ten minutes his thoughts were busy with the past, and with the vision of the morning.

If that were a real vision, and not a mockery, should he be glad or sorry? Were those who passed him that morning

the persons he supposed, he felt that the old bitterness would revive. To see *them* together, was more than he could calmly bear. Lost in reflections of this engrossing character, the moments slipped away; he forgot his haste, the fire, the absent hunter, the Red river country—every thing but Mariquita and her dark-browed lover.

In the mean time, Dick, hopeless of his master's attention, had wandered off in search of game on his own responsibility.

Suddenly, through the deep silence, broke the sharp crash of a rifle; a moment later, there was a crash of underbrush. Thoroughly startled from his lonely reverie, Louis looked up to see a panther in the open space before him. Lashing his tail, his eyes shining like green fire, his breast streaming with blood, the maddened creature paused in his very path, prepared in two seconds more to leap upon him. Mechanically the young man reached for his rifle, which he had leaned against the tree at his side, trying to make the movement as softly as possible, for instinct told him that any attempt to stir would hasten his peril. With the coolness of sudden imminent danger, his eyes looked quietly into the burning orbs of the beautiful, ferocious beast. A fascination, such as that attributed to the rattlesnake, began to wrap him, as he gazed, though his hand still moved cautiously in search of his rifle, when his attention was distracted by the appearance of Buell, who came making through the grove, shouting to him to look out. The spell was broken for the panther, also; for, just as Louis, starting a little at the cry of Buell, and turning his eyes, knocked over the weapon he meant to possess, the creature sprung. He was borne to the earth beneath its weight; its hot breath was in his face; he felt its teeth in his shoulder; but, at that horrible crisis, he heard the fierce yelp of his dog, and was conscious that Dick had grappled with the enemy. The panther threw off the dog, as if he were a feather, but, in the instant thus gained, Louis freed his knife from his belt, and inflicted a severe wound in the animal's chest, which caused it to draw back; only, however, to return more furiously to the charge, when the fierce beast was again throttled by the faithful dog, who held to his throat until his master dealt a second and more effective blow, piercing the panther's eye to his brain.

"Well done, Dick! You're a soldier! Smart dog, that," cried Buell, running up, out of breath, as the creature stretched itself out in death. "Hallo, Louis, how are you! Alive, my boy? Good for you! I thought your time had come. Wouldn't have given a jack-knife for your chance two minutes ago. Here, take a drop of whisky, and don't faint, now it's all over."

"I don't feel like fainting," said Louis, sitting down, while the color came back to his white face. "But, it isn't pleasant to have such a bad breath as that so close in your face, and my shoulder don't feel altogether comfortable."

He leaned back against the tree, looking rather ill, despite his assurance. Buell insisted on his swallowing some spirits, and then immediately, in a business-like manner, stripped the torn and bloody clothing from the mangled shoulder.

"'Tain't as bad as it might be, young man; two or three pretty deep gashes. They'd soon heal, if it wasn't for the p'ison. I'll wash 'em out well in cold water, and keep on wet cloths. Nothin' like cold water, as I used to say when I was a hydropathic doctor down our way, unless I can find some plantain leaves. I seen the Injuns use 'em here, last year, and they drew the p'ison of snakes out like a charm. Oh, Louis, here's some of 'em, sure as my name ain't Moses. I'll bruise a few and bind on, and if that shoulder ain't healed up in less'n three days, I'll eat a peck of Epsom salts. Poor Dick! you cotched it too, didn't you! That's right! go in the water, and keep there a spell. If humans knew how to doctor half as well as dumb brutes, there wouldn't be so many bills to pay. Jist soak yourself well, Dick. There, you're purty comfortable, my friend. Blast it, the worst of it is we've lost our dinner. Here I am without a bit o' fresh meat. You see, when I used the bleat, expectin' the mother deer to run to the rescue, thinkin' she heard her young-un' cry, instid of the doe, out come this here ugly customer, expecting to get a nice fawn for his dinner. Wal, I was behind a bush, and he comes close up, lookin' for the fawn. I had plenty o' time to take good aim, and I thought I'd made sure of his eye, but whether I was onduly excited or not, I can't say—leastwise, I made an unpardonable blunder. I hit the beast in the breast, and didn't kill him. He came at the bush in a towering rage, but

I got out o' the way, and give him a dig in the ribs, from behind a tree, which made him madder'n ever; but he couldn't find me, he was so blind and furious; so he sot off in your direction. I thought of you, and I took after him with a vengeance, but he was a little too fast for me. I could a' killed him after he'd tackled you; but I was afraid of murderin' my friend at the same time. I was comin' up with my knife when Dick pitched in. But it's all-fired mean, we've lost our dinners, for we can't eat *that* flesh," and he kicked the dead panther.

"Dear, brave Dick," said Louis, as the dog crept out of the water, and lay down by his master's side, looking wistfully and joyfully into his face, as if he knew he had served him. "Never mind the dinner, Buell; we'll make out with what we have. And in the mean time, I'd advise you to reload your rifle. If this is the kind of game you hunt about here, it behooves us to be ready for it. So you think this provoking wound is going to prevent my traveling?"

"Them plantains 'll keep down the inflammation; so, if you don't overheat yourself, there'll be no danger. We'll jist hold on, till the sun's a little lower, and then purceed to the best of our ability. There'll be a small show of moon in the first of the evenin', and it's my opinion we'll reach the Injun village about midnight. Hist, boys, there goes an antelope! Lend me your gun, Louis—we'll have some fresh meat yet."

Louis smiled at the pertinacity of the Yankee, who, having made up his mind to "fresh meat," hated to give up the idea. In a minute more, an antelope lay dying in the grass. Louis occupied himself loading the rifles, while Amos, delighted with his success, busied himself getting up a good dinner.

The vision of the morning, in the midst of these stirring realities, grew more and more like a dream to the younger hunter, until, when ready again to resume the journey, he was persuaded that he had been the victim of a delusion.

Still, there were the horses to recover; and they started on, animated with the resolution to outwit the thieving Wachitas.

Louis' shoulder was painful, but not so much so as he had feared—the cool bandages of plantain acting like a charm. Had he been suffering ten times as much he would not have

given up. Something drew him forward with silent power, albeit, he reflected severely upon the weakness of his self-delusion. It had been an eventful day for him—much more eventfull even than his companion could guess or apprehend.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE NET AGAIN.

"Do hear them pesky dogs. They'll have the hull village roused," muttered Buell, as the two adventurers drew near the confines of the Wachita lodges. "It ain't best to go any nearer, at present. It must now be nigh onto midnight, and we're purty nigh tuckered eout. We'll jist drop down here and take a good nap. About three o'clock, as soon as it's light enough to pick eout our own, we'll jist creep inside the corral, and git our animals. Jerusha! won't it be fun, after we're safely mounted, to rouse up every darned Injun, and let 'em see how much smarter white folks are than red-skins?"

Chuckling with anticipated triumph, he spread his blanket and laid down; Louis, who felt a little chilly with fatigue and pain, took the warm breast of Dick for a pillow, and drew his blanket closely about him. He, too, was soon asleep, for he had exerted himself greatly; but, the twinges of pain in his shoulder disturbed his slumbers, and they were full of broken dreams. Now, he would be facing that terrible panther, so glossy, so graceful, yet so dangerous; and, anon, the wild creature would glide into the likeness of Mariquita. He would shudder as *her* eyes shone upon him with that soft, alluring, yet fearful fascination, out of the panther's face. Or, seeing Mariquita, all gentle, caressing, and beautiful, he would approach her, to take her to his bosom, when suddenly the hot, fetid breath of the wild animal would mingle with his own, and that savage embrace would agonize him. In such slumber there was but little refreshment, and he was glad, after starting out of one of these disagreeable dreams, to distinguish a faint flush along the eastern horizon. Touching Buell, the

two men, a moment later, were stealing noiselessly into an inclosure, where a hundred or so of mustangs and horses could be dimly seen, standing or lying, in their night's repose.

So perfectly guarded were their movements that not a single one of the numerous little dogs appointed to give warning, awoke. Dick, silent and wary as his master, had no sooner entered the corral, than he trotted quietly to a certain animal, standing on the further side. Louis followed, knowing that he should be led directly to his own horse; and, surely enough, when he reached Dick, there stood the splendid black stallion he so prized and loved. A low whinny of delight was given by the horse, but Louis put his hand over his mouth, and severing the thong which bound him to a stake, the next instant he was upon his noble steed's back. Dick, well satisfied, then trotted off after the other horse, which he soon found—sooner than Buell would have done, since the light was not strong enough to distinctly mark objects a short distance away. This was also a very fine animal, though not equal to that of Louis, who had purchased his with a large sum of money, from a Mexican noble, several months previously.

The two probably were quite the best horses of the collection; and no doubt the Wachitas felicitated themselves highly on their cunning robbery. Walking them softly out of the inclosure, and for some distance down the valley, they there awaited, behind the shelter of a copse, the surprise and discomfiture of the robbers, when they should emerge from their lodges and discover the absence of their stolen treasures.

Buell was thinking solely of this; but his companion was agitated by far other feelings. During the hours of night, both while waking and sleeping, the belief again had gained ground with the young hunter that he was near Mariquita. The Yankee would have opened his inquisitive little eyes to their fullest could he have "guessed" half the fire which was raging in the young man's bosom, like a repressed volcano.

One thing Louis resolved upon: If it *was* Mariquita and her lover, he would remain unidentified by them. This, he was aware, might be impossible, yet that he had changed very much in his appearance during a year of out-door exposure, gave him great hope. His complexion, once rather delicate, and of northern fairness, was now tanned almost to as dark a

brown as glowed in the cheek of the southern cavalier; his hair and beard were long and untrimmed, and his dress that of an ordinary hunter. Still, he would like to disguise himself further, and knowing that Buell had, at the bottom of his kit, a quantity of coarse black Indian hair, strung on a coronet of wire, which he sometimes wore when he wished to pass himself off for a native, the young man asked for it.

"What kink hev' you got in your noddle, now?" asked the Yankee, good-naturedly, turning out the contents of his sack, to find the desired article. "Want to set up for a Waco, and steal the heart of some o' them young squaws? Pshaw! I ain't no objections to the fair sect, myself, as a *gineral* thing, but them Wachitas is too humbly and too dirty for me. Say neow, Louis, what you fixin' up fur? I've never seen you do it before, and I shan't stir a step till I know what it's all about, danged if I do; so, jis' make a clean breast ov your amouricious designs."

"Well," replied Louis, laughing in the midst of his secret agitation, at the insatiable curiosity of his comrade, "there is no more use trying to keep a secret from you than a Comanche from the scent of Dick's nose. I don't think any man acquainted with Amos Buell would accuse the other sex of undue interest in their neighbors' affairs. If you'll promise to drop my name, for the present, and call me Pitkins, instead of Louis, I'll promise to give you a reason for it."

"Well, Mr. Pitkins, what's your reason?" queried the Yankee, sharpening his elbows, and taking up an attitude of such intense solicitude that Louis laughed again. "Out with it, afore I guesses it."

"You've often questioned me about my past life, Buell, and you've guessed rightly that some unpleasant occurrence caused my sudden departure from all former pursuits, and this complete change in my habits. I can not give you the particulars now; but, this much I will confess. In the white man who passed us yesterday, I thought I recognized the person who was the reason of my leaving the States. It is enough to say that he wronged me, and that I hate him bitterly—as you hate a rattlesnake. You can see for yourself that it would be unpleasant for us to meet. However, I am so much changed that I do not believe he will recognize me."

"If there's any likelihood of his calling you eout, or pickin' a quarrel with you, why not let him alone?" asked his listener, his keen face glowing all over with satisfaction at being made the recipient of this important confession. "We've got our horses, and we can just turn tail and back out o' these quarters if they're onpleasant to you. But, it seems to me, Louis —I beg your pardon, Pitkins—that you was mightily taken up with that gal, yesterday. Mebbe *she's* got something to do with the affair, too, eh? Petticoats is allers mixed up with every real oncompromising muss atween men."

A blush of mingled anger and confusion broke through the tawny hue of the young man's cheek; but, it would be useless to quarrel with the good-hearted and brave Amos Buell, so he replied, without answering the question:

"I don't care to leave until I am certain that is the man. You know I was by no means assured he was the same; and I should also like to know what relation that woman sustains to him, if this should prove to be the man I think it is."

"Jest so," was the quiet response, for his interrogator, knowing Louis would tell no more than he thought proper, had made up his mind to wait and judge for himself, confident that he should, ere long, know all. The prospect of a secret, to be picked out by degrees, was exhilarating, and put him in the best of humors.

By this time, the village began to be astir, and presently there arose a great outcry. The two whites, watching the scene from their ambuscade, could see men, women and children running to and fro between the lodges. It was evident that the loss of their lately-acquired property awakened much wrath and sorrow, it, doubtless, being laid to the Comanches. When the whole five hundred inhabitants were well stirred up, and out-of-doors—"Now," said Buell, "let's ride quietly into town, and inquire what's up."

Our friends were not afraid of the consequences, as they knew they had the right on their side, and the Wachitas were both cowardly, and friendly to the whites. As they rode out of the shadow of the copse, and proceeded up the street of the village, with Dick at their heels, the outcry suddenly subsided, as the conscience-stricken inhabitants gazed mutely at the unexpected apparition.

"What's up?" sung out the Yankee, in his most nasal tone, looking about upon the crowd with a triumphant leer. "*Two-bear-e-kets-ah wah-ta-tash?*"—(man dead?)

Nobody having recovered sufficient to answer, he continued:

"*Totch-esch ca-wah-sa?* Ah, *no-com-a-che!*"—(have your horses gone?—ah, the Comanches!)

Here he drew rein and looked coolly about him. Presently two or three Indian men, looking very foolish, came slowly up to them. "We're travelers," he said, "want breakfast, want food for horses, want guides to go on West. Can you give them? We pay well." And he jingled the loose silver and other contents of his pockets. Speaking partly in Wachita, partly Mexican, and a little English, he managed to make himself understood, and was answered in the same jargon.

"Yes, they could have breakfast, and green-corn, and guides. There were two white people with them now, who wanted to go on to Santa Fé, and who had hired some of them, at a good price, to protect them from the Comanches. The Comanches were very mad at the white people—they had torn up the papers sent them by the Great Father—they had killed white folks last week. Mustn't travel without much company. Where did they wish to go?—to Santa Fé, also?"

All this time the Indians looked so crestfallen and guilty, that Buell shook with suppressed laughter. It was a good joke, to him, worth the three days of tramping they had been obliged to make since their horses were stolen. He consulted Louis as to what answer he should give about their traveling toward Santa Fé. Louis bade him, by all means, to say they were going there, and should be glad of all the company they could get.

At this moment a white man came out of one of the lodges near by, looking at the group with great interest. Yes, it was *him!*—that nameless stranger, seen but once, yet how well known!—with whom the young hunter's fate had been so tangled. Louis gazed at him with hot, blind eyes, and heart which almost choked him. The Spaniard's hat was off, his loose, embroidered jacket open at the throat, himself as graceful, haughty, careless a specimen of southern beauty and chivalry as the young northerner ever had beheld.

While Buell was busy with the crowd, Louis could only gaze at the stranger, until the thought occurring to him that Mariquita (if it, indeed, were she) might also be reconnoitering *them* from some hidden part of the lodge, and might recognize him despite his strange dress and changed appearance, made him ride around to the other side of his friend, where he would be partially screened from observation. With his hat drawn low down, keeping in Buell's shadow, he gazed covertly toward the lodge, with eager eyes, unmindful of the remarks and proceedings of his companion, who was enjoying himself hugely.

As it would be impossible to translate the mixed Indian and Mexican of the Yankee, we will not attempt to do so.

"Lost your horses, hey?—too bad! We was in the same fix—some rascally, thieving dogs of Wacos or Comanches—it *must* ha' been *them* ('cause the perlite, gentlemanly Wachitas never do *such* things)—took 'em, without even askin', when me and Dick was asleep. Had to foot it three days—too bad, wasn't it? Knew you'd feel bad when you heard it! Such fine horses, too. Make a tribe rich to own a few sich. We scarcely ever expected to see 'em ag'in, but Providence directed our steps to the corral of the cussed thieves, and Dick brought out our animals, all right. Congratulate us, my friends, good Wachitas! What do you think we ought to do to the rascals? Don't you think they ought to be punished?"

He looked innocently into their alarmed faces as he asked the last two questions; they fell back a pace or two, and grunted a feeble assent, stealing frightened glances at each other.

"Hadn't they ought to be made to catch it, right smart?"

Two or three faint nods and grunts were the only reply. He well knew how noisy would have been their condemnation of the thieves, had they had the slightest chance to lay the sin upon others' shoulders.

"*Yeou*, brave chief, old fellow, yeou look wise as a judge. Say, what d'ye think ought to be done to the thieves?" he asked an old Indian, in a chief's dress, whose face was a compound of meanness, covetousness, and duplicity. The old fellow's eyes blinked ruefully, but he made no response.

"Shouldn't you say they ought to give us a good breakfast, a couple o' bushels o' green-corn, three or four pieces of money, and take us along a hundred miles, more or less, for nothing?"

The chief made a grimace, while an expression of deep despondency began to settle on the faces, at first so alert with the promise of white strangers to pluck.

"Speak out—don't be afraid! If that ain't severe enough, mebbe we'd better insist on their giving us a couple o' horses to carry our luggage—for we were put to much trouble, let me tell you."

"They ought to do what the señor said first," finally replied the chief, with great reluctance, in tolerable Spanish.

"Good, Wachitas! d'ye hear? Your chief tells you to get us some breakfast, with plenty o' b'iled green-corn, and give us a guard on our journey; and he advises you never to meddle with Yankee horses again—cause 'tain't no use! We're too smart. Clear out, and cook our breakfast—scatter, you nasty copperheads!"

"See 'em, goin' off like whipped dogs," chuckled Buell, turning to Louis, and speaking his native tongue; "they're an awful disappointed set. Keep a good look eout, or they'll steal the buttons off the back of yer coat. Oh, but they need a thrashing, every one on 'em. I know 'em! Lordy, but they feel mean! Do you know, Pitkins, this would be just the place for a right smart Yankee peddler? A good many of them trinkets they wear, are solid silver, and I could wheedle 'em away if I only had a kit full of gimcracks. Jerusha! wouldn't this be a pretty spot to sell out that last lot o' clocks, I sacrificed for ninety cents apiece? I wouldn't leave this village till every wigwam had a clock tickin' in it, and all the little pappooses dancin' to the music. A load of clocks, neow, with a lookin'-glass in the door of 'em, *would* create a sensation! I'd have all the silver dollars in the Wachita territory. But, that's the plague of speculating! you can't get your wares to the right market, or the market's overdone. Something's always wrong. By the way, is that the chap, Mr. Pitkins?"

"Yes," was the brief reply. "But, let us ride on a few steps further, as I don't care to be recognized."

"He's coming out to speak to us, which is only nat'ral, considerin' the scarcity of white folks in these parts. You can ride on, and let me do the talkin', if you think best."

Knowing that the stranger had no idea of his identity, and being careful to keep his back toward the lodge, Louis concluded to keep still. Little did the young Spaniard imagine, as he gave a polite greeting to the two hunters, that, under the slouched hat of one scowled the brows of the bitterest enemy he had in the world. He asked the travelers whither they were going, saying he should be glad if their routes lay the same way, as he understood the Comanches were, at present, more troublesome than usual. As Buell did not know the wishes of his friend, he was compelled to allow him to do the principal part of replying. Louis answered that they were hunters, who were out merely for adventure; that they had no fixed route to pursue, but had thought some of going as far west as Santa Fé. The Spaniard seemed pleased at this, urging them to do so, and saying that he would be glad to extend them the hospitalities of his house in Santa Fé, in return for the pleasure of their company. The more, the merrier, as well as the safer. He had had much dealing with the Comanches, and ordinarily was not afraid of encountering them; but, he believed they had lately become exasperated at some real or fancied injury, and that quite a large war-party was now out, to waylay white travelers.

"Have you confidence in the bravery of your Wachita guard, in case of an attack?" asked Louis.

His voice sounded in his own ears like the voice of a stranger. The effort to be calm, under the circumstances, was perfect.

"Not much," said the stranger, smiling. "I rely more upon my own arm than upon them."

There was a quiet courage, blended with fanciful humor, in that smile of the young Spaniard, which would immediately have kindled a glow of sympathetic liking in Louis' bosom, had the relation between them have been different. He mused, for a moment, what decision to make with regard to accepting the offer of joining forces. He knew that it would be nearly, or quite impossible, to approach Mariquita, as he would be compelled to do in the event of accompanying

them, without his betraying to her his identity. This could be productive of nothing but painful, if not tragic, consequences. Yet, if there was really any imminent danger of the Indians, could he leave *her* to go on, unaided by such help as two more courageous men might give the party?

Ah! as that question was put to his own heart, Louis felt that he still loved the beautiful, false being who had shone upon him but to blast his budding hopes. He had persuaded himself that he loathed, despised her—that she was nothing to him but a degrading memory. Yet, at the idea of peril, of a cruel death perhaps, to her, he began to feel that, despise her as he did and must, he loved her still.

Another proof that love still lingered, was in the intense, the angry jealousy he felt toward the man before him. A thrill of mingled joy and hatred passed along his nerves at the thought, that perhaps the Spaniard might fall a victim to the Indians, while he should be permitted to rescue Mariquita. The next moment he upbraided himself for the guilty thought. The blood of a hundred lovers could not make Mariquita lovable, were she as treacherous as his own eyes and ears had proven her to be.

In the mean time, impatient at playing "second fiddle" in the colloquy, his Yankee friend had begun "a swop" with a dirty Wachita, whom he was trying to persuade that a broken-bladed jack-knife was still as good as new, and a fair exchange for a handsome pair of Mexican stirrups which he coveted for his horse's accouterments, and which the other had suspended across his shoulders, having probably been on his way to the corral, perhaps to saddle that very horse, when its loss was discovered.

CHAPTER V.

THE CANON CAMP.

"WHAT say you to my proposition, señor?" asked the Spaniard, who seemed to have taken a fancy to the young hunter, despite his constrained, unfriendly expression. "You are brave, I know—one of the kind to enjoy adventures, so

that they be not too hazardous. I have some fine mines to show you, when we arrive in New Mexico. Perhaps you will conclude to remain there, as I did, quite unexpectedly to myself. I, too, was a rover, without any particular object, except, to be sure, in my poor case, I inherited from my father the right, title and interest of half a dozen poorly-worked gold-mines in Northern Mexico. I doubt, however, if I should ever have tried to make the property available, if unpleasant matters at home had not driven me abroad."

Before Louis could frame an answer, a voice thrilled through him, driving the color from his cheek, and causing him to start, despite the guard which he had established over himself.

"Pedro!"

So sweet, so clear, so tender!—that same siren voice!—ah, heaven; how it ran like fire through and through him! how it brought back the past! the last evening he had spent with her, when she had brought the bridal vail, and with blushes and laughter, had thrown it over her black hair, to show him how it was to become her, when—He bit his lip till the blood stained his teeth, forcing himself to composure. He did not see her, for he had purposely turned his back to the cabin, but he knew that she had come to the door, and that, if he should change his position, he would meet her face to face.

"Yes, Mariquita, I'll be with you in a moment," answered the Spaniard, speaking in English, as he had done to the hunters.

"You've got a right purty little wife, there," remarked Buell, who, unable to effect the desired "trade," had turned at the sound of a woman's voice, and given one of his impudent, curious stares at the girl, and now gave his opinion to the stranger, with characteristic freedom—"a right purty little wife. I don't wonder you feel a little shy of the Comanches, with *such* company aboard."

"Wife?" queried the Spaniard, with another flashing, amused smile; and then, as if thinking better of the explanation, about to arise to his lips, added—"she is, indeed, a fine little girl, and very dear to me. It is more on her account, than any thing else, that I wish for a stronger escort. I should not like harm to befall my little Mariquita."

The slight accent of surprise and amazement—was it not, also, contempt?—had not escaped Louis, nor the afterthought to let the mistake go uncorrected.

"She is not even his wife," he muttered, under his breath. "*I'll go!*"

"What shall I tell her? She is impatient to hear the news." again asked the Spaniard.

"We will go with you, at least until you are satisfied that you have passed or out-traveled the war-party," said Louis. "We came upon its trail the day before yesterday, and, I think, you, too, must have passed it. It seems to me, it took a different direction from our route."

"That is nothing. They'll be sure to come out somewhere on the road where least expected."

"And now, as I suppose you care not how early you start, we will betake ourselves to breakfast, feed our horses, and be ready to take up the line of march. In the mean time, if you are prepared, I would advise you to begin your journey. We can easily overtake you in the course of a few miles, and it is pleasanter traveling in the morning than in the heat of the day."

This proposition was made by Louis, because he was anxious to keep a little behind the main party. He dreaded to come near Mariquita, yet he was resolved to see her through the dangers of the journey—and—and—he did not care to confess his further resolves.

The Spaniard, pleased at the prospect of such available company, promised to do as recommended, and to be on the way in less than half an hour. The agreement being completed, and the hunters receiving from the chief an intimation that the green-corn was boiled, accompanied by a very dirty squaw, proceeded to their breakfast.

Louis had not turned for one glance at the beautiful face which he knew looked out from the lodge so close—so close to him. In something less than an hour after, he was following in the rear of the large party of Wachitas who had mounted and armed themselves to continue as the escort of the whites. Señor Pedro D'Estanza—for so he had given his name in return for the information solicited by the inquisitive Buell—rode in the advance; by his side was the Yankee, and a little in the rear, the only woman of the party managed her

spirited Mexican pony with skill and ease. About, on every side, rode his dusky body-guard, while, despite the impatience of his jet-black stallion, which was unused to so craven a position, the young hunter lingered many yards behind. Two or three times, Señor D'Estanza rode back to challenge him to gay conversation, and to invite him to a place in the front rank, but the hunter retained his reserve and his determination to remain in the background with such evident obstinacy, that the good-natured young gentleman finally gave up the attempt to make a companion of him, and left him to his thoughts—just then not the most agreeable companions nor the most safe. Louis had given Buell a sharp warning not to mention any name but that of Pitkins, or to give any hint of his previous acquaintance with the Spaniard; but he did not feel entirely easy when he saw the unbounded loquacity of his Connecticut friend. However, not even Buell knew him by the name of Grason; he passed as Mr. Louis with him. Neither did the Yankee know enough of his antecedents to betray any thing of real importance. Louis still wore the wild locks of Indian hair; but he was aware that they formed no particular disguise, and he did not dare trust himself any nearer to the woman of whom he had become, thus curiously, one of the protectors and guides.

He rode as one in a dream. The full sunlight of a lovely June day, the fragrance of the morning air, the beautiful valley, the picturesque group of half-clad Wachitas, all seemed to him like parts of some unsubstantial vision, the "baseless fabric" of which floated before his eyes like the phantom of a mirage, or the ghosts of a spirit which would not be laid. His gaze was fixed much upon the round, light figure of the horsewoman, riding in advance of him. Her thick braids of hair gave back a purple-black brilliance in the sun; her figure so light, yet so exquisitely graceful, seemed to gather dignity from the ease with which she sat upon her horse; several times she turned her head and gave a curious, inquiring glance at the white hunter who persisted in being so unsocial. On those occasions, Louis had a fair look into the face of the beautiful false one; the flash of those bright, steady eyes, struck to his inmost soul. He watched her keenly. There was, upon that sweet face, an unmistakable sadness—a shade

of a present sorrow. Either she was worn and fatigued with her long, perilous journey, or else some personal experience had wrought a change in features and form. The once exquisitely rosy countenance had less color; its wonderful vivacity had almost entirely disappeared; a dark line was clearly drawn under the eyes; her form was thinner, though it still retained Mariquita's matchless grace. He thought he should like to hear her cough—that little, sudden ripple of music which used to delight him so; but, although Buell had taken up a position beside her, and was endeavoring (as was evident from his grimaces and his own twanging laugh) to make himself amusing, he did not once hear the old, joyous burst of mirth. On her thin lips may have lain a momentary smile, but it was only momentary, for the expression of pain would not be banished.

In the mean time, the sun rose high toward the zenith, blazing down fiercely upon the wild cavalcade, whose knives and rifles flashed beneath its rays, as they wound along at a decreasing pace. They had left the valley, and, after a few miles of hot and arid plains, were glad to enter a defile made by the bed of a creek, now dry. Here the atmosphere was cooler, for along-side ran a low spur of the mountains, not much more than a bluff, but wooded, and throwing a grateful shade across the rough trail. The whites were informed by the Indians that water, fresh and pleasant, was to be found four or five miles in advance; and at that spot they were to take their mid-day repose and refreshment. It was so near the village of the Wachitas, and on a path so well known, that our travelers felt as if the real dangers of the journey had not yet begun. If they met the Comanches at all, both the Indians and the whites supposed it would be a hundred miles further on toward the head-waters of the Red river—up which their trail led.

A little before noon, they reached the promised water, and found it a clear, cool rill, gushing out of the rocky side of a bluff which was here broken crosswise by a gully or ravine, admitting the delicious liquid to a free path. Inexpressibly refreshing did this fountain prove, as only those who have traveled in parched and arid regions can appreciate. A breeze also blew down from the mountains, urged along the horizon

to the south; the air was like liquid sapphire, and so exhilarating to breathe, that even Louis could not resist its inspiring influence. Here the whole troupe alighted; the animals were watered, and, while a portion of the men took their noon meal, the rest were cautioned to keep a good look-out up and down the cañon to give warning of any approaching strangers.

The Wachitas ate the parched corn and jerked meat which they had brought with them; but the Spaniard brought forth from the panniers of one of the jack-mules the necessaries for a comfortable meal, and a bottle of wine, which he put in the brook to cool. He then, again, urged Louis to join his party; but the latter, eating his crackers and dried buffalo-meat, at a distance, under a tree, briefly, but firmly, rejected his polite attentions. Buell was not so churlish; he did justice to the viands with an appetite sufficient to represent his friend as well as himself. His relish for food was as keen as his relish of a good bargain.

A pleasant bit of shadowy ground, with a rocky wall behind it, close to the water, had been selected for Mariquita. She laid aside her hat, bathing her forehead in the rill, and then sipping her wine and nibbling at the bread and fruit which Señor Pedro placed in her lap, while she listened, with a faint smile, to the endless chatter of the Yankee. Louis sat where he could watch her every motion, while the broad *sombrero*, kept closely down over his own face, prevented the possibility of her recognizing him.

"Thank 'ee, I don't care if I do," said Buell, stretching out his tin-cup for another draught of the precious wine, while his gentlemanly host could scarcely repress a shrug of contempt at his piggishness; "I hain't had nothin' of this sort for some time, and it's quite refreshin'. Tell you what, stranger, I've an idea—a whoppin' big one—which is nothin' less than buyin' up a few thousand acres down South here, somewhere, plantin' a vineyard, and goin' into the wine business. I've no doubt it would pay better'n gold mines. What d'ye think?"

"Have you had any experience cultivating the grape, or in manufacturing the wine?"

"Law, no! not yet. But that'll make no difference

whatever, not the least. I can learn the hull science in less'n a month. But, good gracious me! what's the matter with friend Louis? Ain't he a-makin' signs to us?"

Just then, it seemed as if the breeze had died away, as if the sun stood still, and a deadly rest and lull was upon every thing. Looking up at Buell's exclamation, the young Spaniard had just time to see him throw up his arm with a warning gesture, then catch his gun, and run toward them.

"An ambush!" he shouted.

At the same instant, the crack of a dozen rifles resounded from the bluff above them, and the smoke curled up from every little bush which grew along the edge. Several of the Wachitas leaped into the air, with yells of fear or pain, and then fell to the ground, some of them wounded. None of the whites were injured. Owing to their position, close in against the rocks, their assailants, from their position overhead, could not aim at them. Louis ran across the intervening space and placed himself close to Mariquita. Señor D'Estanza's rifle was instantly in his hand; and Buell, also, despite his whimsicality, cool and courageous in the face of danger, had his gun, and was looking savagely about him for something to shoot at. As he lifted his head, he thought he saw something directly above him, over the edge of the ravine; he fired, and a Comanche came tumbling over and fell at his feet. "Here, yeou pesky cowards! what yer creepin' off for?" he yelled, as the Wachitas, who had escaped the effects of the first volley, began to spring onto their animals and beat a hasty retreat homeward. "Come back, here, you rascals, or you'll all be shot, every one of you. Don't you see you're ridin' right into range o' their bullets? Draw up, here, clost to the rock!"

Some half-dozen of them heard and obeyed him; the rest made off as fast as they could urge their horses, followed by another volley from the ledge above, and exulting yells, as two or three of them reeled and finally toppled from their animals.

"Press as close to the rock as you can," hurriedly said Louis to the frightened girl, who had sprung to her feet, and was clinging to his arm, evidently without knowing what she did.

She obeyed, and in less than half a minute had so recovered her self-possession, as to cry out:

"Pedro, give me one of your revolvers. I can use it, and will, if necessary."

Louis took a revolver from his bosom, and pressed it into her hand. Her eyes flashed with sudden brightness, and her cheeks glowed as she looked up into the bushes along the ledge. Suddenly she raised the weapon and fired. The report was answered by a yell of agony from above. Instead of admiring her courage, Louis stared at her excited face, muttering to himself:

"It is her mother's murderous nature!"

But there was no time now for a lover's speculations. Such of the party as had escaped the first fire were in a more advantageous position than their enemies, who were obliged to look over the edge of the ledge in order to obtain a sure aim—while those on guard below were ready, with raised weapons, to fire at the first protruding head. As long as they could maintain excessive vigilance, and each party remained in its present position, the whites felt comparatively safe. But they had reason to dread a sortie, through the little ravine; though this was so narrow that not many Comanches could make their appearance at one time.

A season of quiet soon followed the first assault. A position requiring such a constrained watch as that of the whites soon grew excessively wearisome. Their business it was to keep incessant look-out for the least motion overhead; while the Comanches could withdrew from the ledge and rest themselves, and consult at leisure. Louis' eyes were fixed upon the ravine, for he anticipated a dash of the enemy out of that, when they found themselves unsuccessful in their attack from above. He conversed with Buell without moving his gaze from the narrow gully through which the water trickled at his feet.

"Rally those cowardly Wachitas, if you can, Buell, and let them creep this way, ready to resist, if the enemy should break out in this direction."

"Darn their copper-skins, they ain't wuth a bad cold in time o' fight. I'd as soon have a battalion of geese! Here, you red-skinned rascals; crawl along thar' and

make ready to p'int up that gully with them pop-guns o' yourn. Oh, plague take it! I didn't tell you to stop lookin' overhead at the same time. Of course you've got to keep guard o' them bushes. A feller that can't look two ways to once, isn't worth a cuss on an occasion like this. You ought all to be cross-eyed; then, mebbe, you could toe the mark. Crawl along, I say, careful now, or—" but the Yankee stopped talking, long enough to fire his rifle, for, just then, he saw a gun softly thrust over the rock behind a clump of bushes.

The two pieces seemed to explode at the same second of time; and, although there was a yell from the clump of bushes which told that Buell's shot had taken effect, for once he was a little too late. Another cry burst from another mouth, and Mariquita, forgetting her own danger, sprung forward, and threw herself upon the body of Pedro, who had fallen forward, wounded, if not killed, by the Comanche's ball. Instantly half a dozen shots were fired at the girl and the fallen man, who had come into range of the rifles above.

"For God's sake, come back!" cried Louis; but as his words were not heeded, he, too, stooped forward, and, with an unusual effort, dragged Mariquita and her friend back against the ledge. The crack of more rifles followed this movement; but he had been too quick for them.

"Are you hurt?" he asked the girl.

"I believe not. I do not think I am. Pedro! Pedro! speak to me!"

The Spaniard had fainted, or was dead, it was impossible to tell which. She pulled his head up to her knee, covering the white face with kisses of anguish.

"He is dead. Pedro is dead!"

The accent of despair with which she spoke these words proved that she had some real feeling for this friend of hers, whether or not she had ever had any for that Louis whom once she had *seemed* to love so truly. An emotion, half triumph, half pain, pierced Louis, as he gazed at them both. His rival was dead. But no! he saw a faint quiver of the eyelids; and, at that sign of life, the native generosity of his soul asserted itself; he crawled forward to the ravine, and reached a handkerchief into the water, to moisten the lips and

forehead of the wounded man. As he did so, he saw a shadow on the opposite wall of the gully, and comprehended that the Comanches were dropping themselves into it, preparatory to a sudden raid upon the party when they should be absorbed in watching for an attack from above. He flung the handkerchief to Mariquita, and, with one gesture, told the story to Buell, who succeeded in making his allies, the Wachitas, understand what was expected of them.

It is not likely, by the way, that the red cowards gained much benefit from his former lecture, as, in his excitement, he forgot his Mexican-Indian lingo, and spoke the most nasal Connecticut. They now, however, seemed better to comprehend his silent gestures, and four or five of them, with Louis and himself, stood ready, with reloaded rifles aimed at the mouth of the ravine. Scarcely had they completed these brief preparations when a wild, sudden, horrible yell deafened their ears, and about fifteen or eighteen Comanches burst from the gully, brandishing their weapons, and expecting to annihilate the whole party in the first surprise of this grand sortie.

The narrowness of the gully was such, that but two could emerge at a time; when, although, they followed each other as rapidly as possible, they were met by a well-directed fire from weapons already aimed. So effective was that reception that full half their number were killed by it.

The others were so astonished, and their courage so broken by this turn of the battle, that they took to flight. They could not return the way they came, for they had dropped themselves, by their hands, into the ravine, and could not climb back, so they were forced to fly across the very path of the defending party. In this attempt to reach the *mesa* above the cañon, where they had left their horses, two or three more fell, one, at least, from the revolver of Louis.

By this time the young hunter had grown too excited, even for prudence; and, shouting to Buell to "come on!" he dashed out into the open space, where, all this time, the frightened animals had mostly remained huddled together. Leaping on his own horse, which, fortunately had escaped injury, he dashed up the bluff, at the first accessible place, followed by Buell, and three or four Wachitas, whose courage had visibly grown now that the enemy was in full flight.

The Comanches were already on the wing!

"Hurrah! after them!" shouted Louis. "Lay them low—give no quarter!"

"Hooray! Scat! Git eout! See them go it! I'm with you, my friend!" echoed the Yankee, and they set off, at top speed, after the retreating band of cut-throats, which still twice or thrice outnumbered them, but which, according to modern parlance, had become "demoralized"—mere "copper-heads" under ban. Whenever our party came near enough they halted and fired at the flying enemy. Several of the Comanches were observed to act as if wounded, though none fell from their animals. They were all, as usual, splendidly mounted, and they made good speed along the level table, or *mesa*, endeavoring to reach the shelter of the more rugged path, which led into the mountains not many miles in advance of them.

The black steed of Louis was a match for the best of the Comanches. His blood was up, and so was that of his master. On, on they flew long after Buell and the Wachitas had given up the chase. Several times the white hunter approached near enough to fire his revolver at the laggards of the party, who, although they flung themselves behind the shelter of their horses' sides, and fired at him from underneath, did not succeed in injuring him or his animal. He had, however, the satisfaction of disabling a brace of them; and, finding himself alone, with the shadows of the mountains lengthening about him, and the way growing less open, finally desisted from the chase.

He rode back at a more leisurely pace. The sun was in the west, the air cool, when he drew rein again in the little spot which had been the scene of so bloody a contest.

"Ho! I began to reckon you'd concluded to jine the Comanches," sung out Buell, as he came within ear-shot. "You've had a nice time, all to yourself, I suppose. How many more did you pick off? A couple? Good for you, my accomplished friend? You'll be famous, if you keep on. Thar' can't be a white man scared up that has killed as many Comanches in one day as you. Purty well, for a new beginner. Wal, we needn't give ourselves any more concern about

that tribe o' Injuns. They'll fight shy of *us*, for the rest of our journey."

"How's the Spanish gentleman?" asked Louis, in a low voice, springing from his horse, and casting a look at the group by the brook.

"Seems to be dyin'," answered Buell, for one instant looking serious, "and that gal of his does take on dreadfully. I feel mighty sorry for her, I tell you."

In his wild race Louis had lost both his hat and his Indian hair. Thinking nothing of this, in the present crisis, and, indeed, indifferent what turn the tragedy now took, he approached the couple.

Buell—who, with his novel life-experience, was no mean surgeon, so far as his means went—had done the best he could for the wounded man, who now lay, silent, and scarcely breathing, his head on Mariquita's lap, his eyes closed, while she, tenderly supporting him, gazed at him, as if all that was left of earth, for her, she saw slipping from her there. She did not even look up when Louis approached, and, kneeling by her side, anxiously examined the countenance of the dying, to find if any thing could yet be done.

"At least, he suffers no pain," said Louis, at last, softly, hoping to convey some consolation by this assurance, for the pathos of her grief had affected him with a strange sympathy, instead of triumph. At the sound of those words, spoken gently, Mariquita looked up wildly; their eyes met, hers fixed in mingled terror and rapture—her lips parted; she struggled to speak, but only a low sigh escaped her; and she sunk forward until her head rested on the bosom of Pedro.

CHAPTER VI

WOMAN INHUMAN.

A FEW months after Louis Grason's disappearance from St. Louis, a singular occurrence took place in the city of New Orleans. We have said, in a former chapter, that a cloud of dark rumors enveloped the family of Madame Mora. This

cloud was growing blacker and blacker; the lady received several intimations from unknown sources that an investigation of the house and premises was soon to be insisted on Her daughter had but lately returned to her, having stayed in St. Louis all summer; and now she had again sent her away —for there was one tender place in madame's heart which was kept soft by her pretty Mariquita; and, however bold a face she might have put upon her own peril, she did not wish her child to be involved in it. So Mariquita was returned to her aunt.

As Madame Mora is a historical personage, whom, otherwise, we should hardly venture to introduce into our pages, we will give a few glimpses of her former life, as it was afterward learned by the curious, when the storm of excitement following her exile had somewhat subsided.

Some thirty years ago, a Spanish gentleman, of immense estates, residing near Lisbon, fell in love with a peasant-girl whom he saw first engaged, with others, gathering grapes in his vineyards. Her beauty was striking, but it was more the influence of her powerful mind and will, than of her personal charms, that so wrought upon the haughty Don, as to make him eager to offer her the honor of his hand in wedlock. He was a widower, of middle age, and without children. The peasant-girl saw, in his infatuation, not the charm of a lover who won her by the fervor of his passion, but an instrument to be used for the furtherance of her ambition.

Mariquita had always been noted, among her own associates, for a pride which looked down on her equals. Not a young peasant of the country, handsome and talented as she was, had dared to offer her a share of his humble fortunes. Lovers she had, who adored her all the more desperately, because they also stood in awe of her, who kept their distance, and "never told their love." Her high temper made her a discomfort to her parents; she always wanted more finery than they were able to afford her; and though they were vain of her gifts and her beauty, they often sighed that she was not less handsome and more tractable.

When the gentleman, the owner of the estates upon which they worked, approached her with some trifling professions, which other girls of her class received from him with great

pleasure, he was made, at once, to feel, how infinitely she scorned any *such* advances. Mariquita's heart never troubled her; her disposition was selfish and calculating; she knew that her brow was fine enough to adorn a coronet, and when she saw the Don hovering about her, like a moth about a candle, she resolved to singe his wings, so that he could not fly away at pleasure. She succeeded in enchanting him to the point of begging her to become his wife. Despite the surprise and remonstrance of his family, who were horrified at this outrage upon the honor of their "blue blood," he actually married the peasant-girl, making her the lady of his castle.

Mariquita was quick to catch the outward graces of refined life; she really made a splendid, imposing appearance at the head of his table, or reposing in her silken chair in his drawing-rooms. Her *hauteur* was equal to the real article; her taste in dress magnificent, and her beauty, thus carefully brought out, superb. Her new relatives had nothing to complain of in her conduct; she forced a sort of respect from them which it pleased her husband to see. Nevertheless, he was not so happy as he had expected to be. His young wife did not seem to feel that pure, artless affection which he had hoped for, in choosing a "flower from the field" to bloom on his bosom. On the contrary, he felt the hardness of her nature, which wore upon and wounded his sensitive and really gentle soul.

At the end of a year Mariquita presented him with a fine, healthy boy. As he had never had children by his first wife, his pleasure was the greater now; he felt grateful to his wife, and trying to overlook the faults of her character, grew once more happy and gay as in the month of his honeymoon.

Alas! his happiness, of which he was so worthy, was very brief. When Mariquita recovered from her short illness, she resumed her life of enjoyment and display with more eagerness than ever; her little son was scarcely remembered by her; and her lip would curl when, at times, she found the fond father, in her chambers, playing with the infant. Among the summer guests at the Don's chateau the season following the birth of the child, was a young gentleman, gay, witty, and of an age to attract the liking of the young woman who had married for position and not for love. This gentleman, too,

was rich and of good family; he sung and played the guitar well, and knew how to pay delicate attentions to the lady of his host. Mariquita was discreet about showing her preference too openly. A strange uneasiness grew in the bosom of her husband. He lost his air of almost youthful gayety, which had come with the birth of his boy, and grew moody, wandering about aimlessly from the nursery of his babe to the walks and gardens where Mariquita lingered with Alonzo.

But, his forebodings did not long trouble him; all his care and anxiety, his love and hope, came to a sudden stand-still; his restless heart stopped, in the midst of its fevered pulsations, never to go on again. One languid summer day, after a light dessert of fruits, wines and cakes, partaken of with his guests, the master of the chateau became suddenly ill; before sunset he was dead.

The physician believed that he died of cholera; the frightened guests fled from the place; the grief-stricken wife was begged to leave the fatal spot, but clung, with touching fidelity, to the plague-infested chateau, and was rewarded for her devotion by no other case of the malady occurring. She played her part well. Two or three of her husband's relations were deeply dissatisfied; but, no strong suspicions were entertained by others, until, within three months of the death of the first, there began to be rumors of a second husband—the handsome, youthful Alonzo. Then the relatives began to speak boldly forth their belief, and the tide of opinion grew deep and strong; when, (it having been decided to disinter the corpse of the Don for the purpose of ascertaining if he had been poisoned,) it swept her off her feet, and compelled her to flee to a foreign country. The friends of Alonzo persuaded him to resign the contemplated match; and in a rage of mortified passion, and fear of the consequences of her crime, the woman gathered up all the moneys, jewels and available funds, and secretly fled, with the child and its nurse, to the United States.

Doubtless she would have left the infant behind, if she had not regarded him as the power to secure, in future, the possession of his father's estates; for, that she hated the boy became constantly more evident.

This strange sentiment of a mother's heart was caused, perhaps, by the torture inflicted on her guilty conscience, reminding

her, as he did, of that murdered man, into whose image he grew more and more. Coming to New Orleans, she bought a handsome place, and lived, under an assumed name, in great retirement, her disappointment at being obliged to leave Spain, and the isolated nature of her present life increasing, week by week and month by month, the natural cruelty of her disposition.

After a residence of a couple of years in her new home, she met a Creole gentleman, in one of her promenades, which she almost daily took, followed by the nurse with little Pedro, who was struck and conquered by one glance of her beautiful face, as she chanced to raise the vail which she always wore. He managed to be introduced to her. Her history seemed fair and open; she was a lady, a widow, rich and prudent; she lived in the seclusion becoming one who had no relatives in the country to shield and introduce her; her child was charming, a high-spirited, graceful little creature, showing "good blood" in every feature and motion.

But, if all these things had not appeared so fair, Señor Mora would have been helpless to resist the fascination of the beautiful widow. In return, he was immensely wealthy, and resembled, in personal appearance, that Alonzo, for whom, of man only, she had felt any affection.

She married the señor. In the course of time came a daughter. The little Mariquita was like her mother in looks; and the mother's self-love reflected itself in some way in loving the child. Besides, she fancied it was like Alonzo. The little girl possessed, really, that contrariety of gifts which we sometimes see; she was like one parent in form and features, modified, of course, by the expression, and like the other in heart, in character. She had the gentleness, the deep capacity for affection, of her father.

The fonder Madame Mora became of her daughter, the more bitterly she hated little Pedro. He grew so distasteful to her, that her passionate dislike would break out in blows and cruel, undeserved punishments. Señor Mora, who tenderly cherished the brave and noble child, could not endure this; finding that his wife made no attempt to control her outbreaks of hatred, he caused the child to be sent to a widowed sister of his own, until of an age to be trusted to the tender mercies

of a boarding-school. Madame made no objections to this arrangement. All she desired was for Pedro to live as much out of her sight as possible, until the change of events should make it prudent for her to return with him to Spain to claim his father's estates. Always hoping for that time to come, she kept herself carefully informed of all that occurred in her native place.

Whether there was something blighting in madame's home atmosphere; whether the fact of living in daily association with a grasping and vicious nature like hers, was fatal to a delicate organization; whether a dreadful consciousness of her true character grew upon him and bore him down; whether she purposely persecuted him, or whether the natural tendency of his constitution to consumption was hastened by these influences, was never fully decided by the gossips. It was known that madame's second husband went rapidly into a decline, dying when his daughter was two years of age, after a lingering illness, quite different from the sudden agonies which took away the first.

After this there was no restraint upon Madame Mora's vicious mind. She continued her secluded life, making up for the want of other excitement, by exercising her ingenuity in rendering her household unhappy. Little Pedro was sent twice or thrice, on a brief visit, to his mother, during the years of his early boyhood. From these visits he always returned to his aunt, pale, silent and depressed, shrinking from any allusion to his mother, but wild, eager, radiant, when talking of his dear little sister, his pretty little Mariquita.

It seemed, as he grew older, as if he might even be willing to endure the unpleasant companionship of his mother, for the sake of being near his sister; but this she gave him no invitation to do; and presently Mariquita was sent away to the North, to a convent, to be educated.

It might seem that madame, loving her daughter so, would scarcely forego her society; but she was shrewd enough not to wish her own habits to pass under the revision of those innocent eyes. She felt a vague yearning for the child's respect, feeling herself unworthy of it.

In the mean time, after Señor Mora's death, she kept back even the allowance made to Pedro for his support, so that

he was thrown upon the charity of his aunt. The boy was proud and talented. He brooded over all that he remembered of his infancy, over his mother's harshness and injustice, and all the vague stories sometimes whispered in his presence by unwise relatives or loquacious slaves. He, somehow, came to the conclusion, that his rights were better than hers to the property withheld from him, and he once ran away from school, and made a journey to New Orleans, to tell her so, and to threaten her with legal investigation if she did not do him justice. There was a fine scene between them. But the boy was resolute, and carried his point. When he came away, he had the title-deeds to a handsome sugar-plantation in Louisiana, and to what the madame, doubtless, considered worthless mining interests, away off, as the property was, in the distant region of New Mexico. With these was a sum in gold sufficient to lift him above the necessity of taking means from others to finish his education.

From that interview the two had parted more unreconciled than ever. The boy was old enough to understand much of what he saw, and to return his mother's dislike with detestation.

Before he returned from this runaway expedition, he paid a visit to his sister in her northern retreat. It was a consolation to him to know that she was with the dear good sisters, and not with Madame Mora.

Several years passed. At every vacation Pedro did not fail to visit his sweet, dear Mariquita, who loved him so much, that she declared the only part of her life that she really lived was these weeks when he was near her and permitted to see her daily. Finally, Pedro left college and began the world for himself. He took possession of his sugar-plantation, put it in better order, and then, restless and troubled by the reports which came to him of his mother's course of life, feeling himself under a ban, he made up his mind to take a long and difficult journey to New Mexico, more for the purpose of diverting his mind than to look after his interests there. He was hastened into this resolution by receiving a private letter from Spain which let a flood of light upon his mother's past history, and which advised him, as soon as he was of age, to cross the ocean and establish his rights to the properties now held by his late father's relatives. It would still be a year

before he was of age, and he resolved to spend that time on a trip to Santa Fé.

During his farewell visit to Mariquita he spoke more openly than he had hitherto done, of their mother's strange persecution of him, and expressed a hope that his sister would remain in the convent until his return. He could not poison her innocent mind with the story of madame's baseness; yet, he could not forbear a mysterious warning, which, should the young girl herself have cause to suspect her mother, would then recur to her mind and be understood.

Before the year of his absence was over, Mariquita was taken home. She did not stay there long; but it was long enough for a consciousness of something sad and wrong to depress and chill her. She was too quick-sighted to be kept in ignorance. The wretched woman was receiving a part of the reward for her evil deeds, in the fact that she could not indulge herself in the innocent society of her own daughter.

There was growing, too, through New Orleans, the muttering of an earthquake of indignation, which threatened to overthrow the foundation of her terrible home. Madame Mora began to consider the wisdom of a second flight. In the mean time, Mariquita was sent to St. Louis to another sister of Señor Mora's to be disposed of in marriage to the first eligible suitor.

After the disaster which terminated her visit there, she was, for a short time, again with her mother. But the shadow of coming vengeance rested on the house, and she was sent away from possible harm to the aunt with whom Pedro had been reared.

Shortly after followed the popular outbreak which resulted in madame's exile. The cries and groans of her tortured slaves had filled the air too full to be longer kept within the limits of her house and garden wall. They were heard without, and even in that city of slave-whipping posts and pillories, could not be borne by an indignant people. The eyes of many a black child, and of its parents, too, for that matter, dilated with awe and terror, as it listened to the stories whispered about, of tortures endured by the slaves of the handsome madame in the handsome house.

One wild and rainy night the firemen of New Orleans

raised a great cry of fire. It must be in the square where was situated madame's house, for toward that they made their way, with rattling of engines and hose, and excited shouts. The people looked in vain. No light of conflagration was to be seen. The firemen dashed up in front of that walled-in mansion. They rattled at the garden gates. It was evident that, if madame's property was on fire, they were bound to save it for her. Madame looked down at them, through the shutters of an upper window. She heard their fierce shouts, and saw them pouring through the gates which a slave had at last grown bold enough to unbar, against her bidding and at theirs. That simple act betrayed the truth. Her reign of tyranny was over. She knew that her house was not in flames, and that the cry of fire was but to cover a conspiracy of those bold fellows to break into her premises and examine for themselves into the truth of certain reports. She knew that when once they had seen all, her life would not be worth a feather in their hands. She had brief time to prepare for flight. Filling her bosom with jewels, snatching a purse of gold, she flung about her a long cloak, and flying down a back stair-case, out upon a secluded garden-path leading to a small door in the rear wall of the flower-garden, she gained the street, as the mob broke, yelling, into the mansion. Along the dark and muddy paths, through the heavy rain, down to the levee, to a spot where she had noticed the flag of a Spanish ship fluttering, that afternoon, in the damp air, she made her way; on her knees she begged the captain to take her aboard, offering him a large reward; and in that mean and dirty little merchant-vessel she remained concealed, sailing with it, and that was the last that was known of Madame Mora in New Orleans.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SAD NIGHT-WATCH.

Amos Buell was in his element—or, more properly, as the old lady said, in his "elements," for he was equally at home in all of them, and if the world could have been resolved into its original gas, perhaps he would have been still more

perfectly at home. To be doctor, nurse, surgeon, housekeeper, cook, purveyor, chambermaid, and director-general of a small force of assistants, was a combination of "situations" calculated to call forth his best resources. In these circumstances he found himself, about sunset of the day of the battle with the Comanches. The few Wachitas who had not fled, and who still were able to perform duty, were set to gathering firewood from the *mesa* above, to attending their wounded brethren, corraling their horses, and keeping guard.

Buell had a small camp-kettle, which belonged to the traveling equipments of Señor D'Estanza, on the fire, over which he was fussing like a genuine French cook. He had found some savory herbs in the grass of the *mesa*, and with these, and the limited stock to be found in the commissary department, he was concocting a soup of delicious odor, while the coffeepot gave forth a ravishing aroma. Every two minutes he would leave his station by the fire to run up to the group by the rock, and take a new observation, to assure himself that they were getting on as well as circumstances would permit.

Mariquita had recovered from her swoon, and was sitting, pale and almost as quiet as marble, by the couch which had been improvised for the señor, out of a buffalo-skin and a pair of blankets. The señor's symptoms were slightly more favorable. He had roused from his insensibility, and now breathed with some ease, while his pulse had rallied from its feeble, imperceptible motion, to something like a genuine beat. With plenty of stimulants and the best of care, it seemed possible that he might yet recover. A small bottle of the choicest brandy, which was found in his portmanteau, now proved of great service. Louis, kneeling by him, at brief intervals, gave him a small spoonful of this, diluted with water; he constantly bathed his forehead, chafed his hands, or fanned him with a *sombrero*.

Not a word had the young Spaniard spoken to Mariquita, and this it was that chilled her into that unnatural silence, despite the joy she ought to have felt at the faint prospect of her friend's life being saved to her. Presently Buell approached, for the twentieth or thirtieth time. He had a basin of soup in his hands, which he offered, with a profound bow, to the young girl. She shook her head, declining it; but when

she attempted to utter a word of thanks, her lips quivered, and she burst into tears.

"There, neow, you'll upset me and the soup, too, if you go for to do that," exclaimed he, and he actually drew forth a red bandana and rubbed his eyes in sympathy. "'Tain't no use lettin' trouble spile your appetite. You oughter be thankful for the change which has jist taken place, and which, under Providence, I take the credit of, my dear. I'm a nateral-born doctor, you see, and kill more'n I cure. That is, I've killed three Comanches, and now I'm bound to cure one fine young gentleman. He'll git well—you may bet on *that*—and now, if you want to keep up your strength to nuss and tend on your husband, you *must* eat. We eat to live, and we can't live without. I made this soup on purpose for your ladyship, and if you don't recommend it, I shall be dissapp'inted. It's light and nourishin'—jest what you need—and with half a pint of strong coffee, will keep you up all night, if you want to watch with him. Say, neow," he added, coaxingly, "try a little, won't you?"

She reached forth her hand for the basin, and attempted to swallow a few mouthfuls, to please him. He watched her, wistfully.

"Oh, don't give it up so. If you'll eat every drop o' that, I'll promise to feed some to your husband before midnight. It'll do him good."

"He is not my husband; he is my own dear brother," said Mariquita.

She did not see the start Louis gave when she made this assertion, nor the wild, sudden, piercing look he fixed upon her; her eyes were cast down, and the great tears were rolling over her cheeks.

"Such duplicity seems incredible," was the mental comment of the man who had once loved her with such entire and sudden faith.

"Hey? you don't say so; your brother? I thought he was your t'other half. Wal, neow, really, and you ain't married at all, perhaps?" burst forth Buell, this new view of the case exciting his ready interest.

"No—oh, no! I have no mother, no father, no friend, no relative in the world, except him—my dear brother He will

die, and leave me here, on this wild plain, friendless and unprotected. Ah, I wish that I could die, too!" She uttered this complaint, as if it was wrenched from her heart, by that cold and cruel look of the man who knelt by her brother's side. The utter despair of countenance and voice was too much for the soft-hearted Yankee; the red bandana went up to his eyes again.

"*Don't* talk in that style, my dear young lady, or you'll have me a-blubberin' in less'n a minute. Do you think *we* are savages and Comanches? Don't say you have no friends. *I'm* your friend. I swear to you, if your brother dies, I'll never leave nor forsake you, till you're safe to the place for which you set out, or back in the States. I'll be a brother to you, and so will Mr.—— Pitkins. No sister shall ever be treated more respectfully. Good Lord! don't you know the stuff a genewine American gentleman is made out of? He couldn't hurt a woman who was thrown on his purtection! he couldn't let her travel without 'tendin' to her wants. He gives her the best seat in the cars, the shady side of the deck, carries her carpet-bag, holds her baby, lends her his umberrella. I don't doubt, if he was called on, he'd make a bridge of himself for her to walk over the gutter. And, my gracious! if he found a woman, unpurtected—a lady—'way out West, in a savage country—alone on a prairie, I don't know what he wouldn't do for her! His feelings would be too much for him! his heart would melt down like butter in the sun. There's one thing he'd do—he'd fight and die for her," concluded the quondam lecturer, savagely, glaring around as if to see if there was any occasion for doing it just then. His emotions had carried him away on a stream of unpremeditated eloquence.

There was no mistaking Amos Buell's sincerity, through all this bombast, and the poor girl forced a smile to reward him.

"There, that looks more like it! And don't you go to talkin' no more about bein' friendless. I've got an old mother to home would be tickled to death to let you live with her, if the wust comes to wust. But *'tain't* comin'!—I tell you, that man's goin' to git well. The awkward part of the business is, he won't be fit to move for a fortnight. We're in for it, no mistake. We've jest got to camp out, and take it easy. But, don't you fret about *that*. I'll show you how a Yankee can

keep house out-o'-doors. If we only had a few comforts for the sick man, I shouldn't mind it a snap of my finger. Howsomever, there ain't no evil without its good. This pure, healthy air will do more to set him on his feet, than the best doctor in New York city. If everybody's patients could be nussed out-doors, there'd more of 'em git well. Come, now, eat up your soup, and say if I ain't a right smart cook."

Mariquita ate the soup, to gratify him.

"If I were hungry I know it would be delicious," she said, as she returned the basin.

"You'll have some coffee?" he asked, anxiously.

"If you please."

He hurried back to his kettles, delighted.

Then, when the lady was served, Louis must sup; then the wounded Wachitas must have some soup, and, with all his various cares, the "chief cook and bottle-washer" worked himself into just the hurry and excitement which he liked best. Before the long, rosy, soft twilight deepened into night, every thing was arranged to the best advantage, men and animals fed, two Wachitas placed on guard, with Dick on the outer picket-line, as surest to give alarm in case of any stealthy approach, the weapons all looked to, loaded, and ready to hand, and the camp established. Then the two white hunters and the woman set themselves to keep the watch, with the large stars glistening overhead, and the soft gurgle of the rill drowning the light sound of the señor's feeble breath. Mariquita steadily refused to lie down, or to sleep. Whenever Louis stole a glance at her, he saw her bright, dark eyes fixed on the face of the sufferer. So brief were the summer nights, and so intense the luster of the heavens above those southern plains, that a pale radiance, like that of dawn and moonlight blended, shone all through the hours, giving sufficient light to read the changes in the patient's countenance. He slept the greater part of the time; whenever he awakened, his glance sought the face of the girl, and finding her close by his side, meeting her look of love, he would close his lids and sleep again.

Bitter were the emotions which swelled in Mariquita's bosom through those oppressive hours. She knew that the life of Pedro hung by the slenderest thread; for, grateful as she was to the kind hunter for his assurances that he was out of

danger, she placed just enough confidence in them to keep her hopes from going out entirely. It seemed so strange to her, to be sitting there, within three feet of Louis Grason, whose presence should have filled her with joy, and a sense of safety—with happiness unutterable—only to feel more desolate and wronged than she had ever felt before.

From the history given in the preceding chapter, the reader knows, what Louis does not, of the relations between her and Pedro. That she should have been engaged to Louis, and yet never have mentioned to him that she had a half-brother, may appear strange. But all the incidents of her life were strange, and this was of a color with the rest. When she went to St. Louis on that visit to her aunt, she had begun to realize, with vague awe and unhappiness, that something was wrong in her own home—to distrust her mother. She recalled, and partially understood, those intimations which her brother had given her before he first set out for Santa Fé.

When we remember how brief was the period of wooing, how really strange to each other in all the outward relations of their lives, the lovers were, it is quite natural that Mariquita should have shrunk from confiding to her betrothed the unpleasant portions of her family history. She could not tell him of her brother, without letting him know of the strange, unnatural antipathy between him and her mother. She could not bring herself to speak a word of doubt of her own mother. If she had known her mother's true history, she would never have married without telling it all to her affianced. But, knowing nothing positively, and not guessing half the reality, she only felt oppressed by a vague sense of evil, which she could not explain, and had, therefore, no means of confiding. From every unpleasant foreboding she flew to the light of Louis' love, nestling there in sweetest consciousness of safety.

However, she had fully purposed to tell him of Pedro, and that a warfare existed between her brother and parent; once or twice within that last momentous week she had sought an opportunity for a quiet conversation with her lover; but none had occurred, when the day came upon which Pedro, returning from Santa Fé by the northern trail, unexpectedly presented himself in St. Louis. He had sent a note to her aunt's house, annonncing his arrival, and begging her to keep it a

secret from their aunt, as he had communications of the greatest importance to make to her alone, and did not wish his mother to suspect but that he was still far at the West. He desired her to meet him at his boarding-house on B—— street, where he could talk with her, uninterrupted by others.

She hastened to meet him. After the first affectionate greetings were over, the brow of Pedro began to darken; he looked vexed and unhappy as he strode back and forth through the narrow limits of his apartment, biting his lips, and glancing doubtfully at his sister. At last he sat down by her, took her hands, and said:

"Mariquita, our mother is totally unfit for you to live with. I heard truths about her, when I was in Santa Fé, through a friend of my dead father's, who came on there from Spain, which horrified me. I knew that she was cruel, selfish and malignant; but I did not know that she was a —— what she is. I could not rest, when I thought of you, my little sister, under her guidance, loving and trusting her as a mother. I resolved to perform the wearisome journey back to the States, to ask you to fly with me, where we shall never hear from her, or see her, more. The reason I wish to keep my return a secret is this: if I should take you with me, she could reclaim you, as you are not yet of age, and I know that she would leave nothing undone which her wicked imagination could invent, to torment if not destroy me, and to recover you. My purpose is to start immediately for Spain. I shall be of age by the time we reach it, and shall take steps to place myself in possession of estates there, which will make me a grandee, little one, and enable me to burden your pretty brow with as many jewels as it can bear. My father, Don D'Estanza, left immense estates, which are now claimed by his brothers. But I am the rightful heir. I understand, now, for the first time, why my mother has permitted me to live. She has hoped, some time during my minority, to take me back to Spain, and, as my guardian, to assume the control of my property. But years have rolled away, and the tide of public sentiment has continued so strong against her that she has not dared to take this step. *Now*, I suppose, since I am my own master, she will not care what becomes of me or the estates. Yet, for fear that, out of pure malice, she may try to

obstruct me, I would rather that she should kuow nothing of my movements, until I am across the water. Hence this secrecy. What say you, little sister? Will you share my fortunes?"

Stunned by vague fears, and consciousuess of some great, unspoken guilt on her mother's part, yet loving and clinging to her as a parent, Mariquita sat, bewildered aud unhappy. That fine evidence within us, which can not be gainsayed, assured her that her brother spoke the truth—that he was right, and her mother wrong. She began to weep; but when Pedro pressed her for an answer, then, with bright blushes, whose warmth dried her tears, she made to him confession of her betrothal.

A little disappointed that he could not take his beautiful sister to grace his Spanish chateau, Pedro yet loved her too unselfishly to be sorry to hear of her great happiness. He questioned her closely of the character and position of her lover, and was well satisfied with her answers.

"I would like well to stay to your wedding, little one, but I hardly think I will. Madame Mora would be sure to hear of my presence, and I think I will carry out my original plan, *minus*, my sister. Now, however, that I think twice of it, since you are not to be my company, I believe I will return to Santa Fé, and defer my excursion to Spain until next summer. I am in no haste, since you are provided for; and—to tell the whole truth, Mariquita—the Spanish gentleman I spoke of, as at Santa Fé, brought over with him a certain sweet young Donna, who might be persuaded to take the trip with me. She would like to see her native Spain again, I dare say. I did not think so much of her bright eyes till I find I have lost yours, little sister. Now, I must compensate myself. It's the way of the world, I suppose."

Mariquita laughed, kissed him, and hoped he would be very successful in winning the bright eyes to shine upon him.

"But what shall I say to my Louis about all this?" she asked, growing suddenly serious. "I would like him to see my brother—you know I am proud of you, Pedro."

"Are you, little witch? I will see him, and love him, some time, but not now. I advise you to say nothing of

family matters to your lover until he becomes your husband. They are too dark, and there is no use in shadowing your sunshine at present. Let them rest. All will be right in the end."

This was bad advice, and given by Pedro because he had never loved, and did not understand how love forgave and covered all things, turning darkness into glory; but Mariquita had unbounded confidence in her brother, and at once resolved to obey him. She felt as if it would be easier, when she was Louis' *wife*, to throw herself on his bosom, and whisper to him all that she wished to say.

The brother and sister spent the afternoon in such talk as is sweet to those who love and are about to be parted; then, as the sun set, he suddenly realized how close and warm his room was, and proposed a walk in the twilight together, through a part of the city distant from her aunt's residence. The two walked out together; neither had partaken of any supper, and they stepped into the little suburban refreshment saloon, at the end of their promenade, for some cream and cake, and to prolong, yet a little while, the hour before parting!

Pedro was not to leave the city until ten the next morning; and before that time had received a note from Mariquita, written in great distress, informing him of the disappearance of Louis Grason.

When Louis did not come to breakfast, the morning after his disastrous mistake, his aunt felt troubled, for he was so regular in his habits, that any departure from them was noticeable. It chanced that one of his cousins called early on Mariquita to consult about some of the bridal finery, and there she learned that Louis had not made his expected visit the previous evening. The young lady knew that he had left the house *en route* for that of his betrothed, and she immediately grew alarmed. What could have become of him?

When the bride saw her grow pale, her color, too, fled; each looked in the other's face in doubt and perplexity.

"I will take a stage and go to papa's office;" said Miss Grason.

Mr. Grason was alarmed. He lost no time in inquiring at every possible place after his nephew. In the mean time, Mariquita wrote the note to her brother, who resolved to wait over a day until Louis was heard from.

Louis was never heard from. No tidings rewarded the growing, anxious search. Day after day fled—still silence, fear, distress. Who shall attempt to paint Mariquita's agony and despair?—the long period of suspense, of trembling, wretched hope and fear, followed by the cold, quiet certainty that he was lost to her. Rewards were offered, and every effort made both by the relatives and the police. A nine days' excitement reigned through the city. It was the general opinion that the young gentleman had been robbed and murdered and his body thrown into the river. Louis' father and mother came on. At the end of a month they put on mourning. Ah, if he could have foreseen the misery his action caused he would not have been so selfish, even if his own happiness had been ruined.

Pedro gave up all his plans, to remain with and comfort his sister. He would not leave St. Louis as long as a ray of hope lingered.

In the fall she went back, for a brief visit, to her mother, and from thence to the aunt who had brought up her brother. Pedro had advised her to act discreetly toward Madame Mora, since she was not ready to place herself under his protection, feeling that a short stay under her mother's roof would not be so injurious to her as to provoke the fierce woman's jealousy. It was not the proper season of the year to attempt the trip to Santa Fé; in the mean time, the sister was to spend the time chiefly with the aunt, taking care not to offend Madame Mora, nor to give her a hint of her determination to go with Pedro, either West or to Spain, if nothing were heard of Louis before the spring. Pedro returned to his sugar-plantation, his own plans having been laid aside, in order that he might watch over Mariquita, and do what he could to restore her shattered happiness. For, to a nature so impassioned as this young girl's, in whose veins ran the sunny blood of Spain and the Creole ardor, a bereavement so sudden and complete had proved nearly fatal. It was Pedro's love and sympathy more than any strength within herself, which upheld and saved her.

Then came that public scene in the drama, when Madame Mora fled ignominiously before the mob, and her house and garden were desecrated and torn to pieces by the hands of an

infuriated populace. For they found abundant evidence of the stories afloat—they opened the room of torture, where, even then, a female slave, young, and soon to become a mother, was expiating in a punishment which we will not describe, some imaginary offense—and they dragged and scattered through the street the ropes, chains, racks, crosses and thumb-screws and bars of iron.

The news of this frightful affair fell like fire on an open wound upon the sensitive, haughty spirit of Pedro; it was more than he could bear; he fretted under it in silent wrath and shame. Selling out all his property in Louisiana, he placed his affairs in condition to leave the country forever, as soon as it would be practicable to take Mariquita with him. His plan was to return to Santa Fé, dispose of his interest in the mines there, marry the Spanish donna, and return to his native land, never to leave it again. The far, wild, and novel journey, he believed, would act beneficially upon his sister, to restore mind and body from the shock they had received. He made successful efforts to keep the cause of his mother's flight a secret from Mariquita, for he was afraid of the consequences of such shame upon one already heart-broken.

Thus it came about that they were where they were, and that they had crossed the wandering track of Louis Grason.

When Mariquita, looking up from the face of her brother, at the sound of that never-to-be-forgotten voice, beheld Louis, alive, well, in the body, before her, she swooned in excess of joy and terror. When she rallied, only to realize that he had been near her all day without making himself known, that he must have recognized her from the first, yet purposely held himself aloof, that he regarded her now as though he knew her not, a new numbing pain, worse than the old grief, palsied her heart.

He was alive—had been living—had given no token of his existence; hence it was evident that he had purposely abandoned her. In the midst of her trouble and loneliness he did not soften toward her, did not extend the shelter of those arms within which was her rightful place of rest. Almost his wife!—in the scant amount of baggage which their mode of travel permitted, she had insisted upon room for that unworn bridal vail and dress which she had kept sacred to the

memory of the man who now sat beside her like a stranger. She was bewildered and benumbed, as she sat, through the starlight night, clasping Pedro's nerveless hand.

CHAPTER IX.

A TRIAL OF SPEED.

MORNING brought a renewal of activity to Amos Buell. He permitted Louis to serve as aid-de-camp, but he was the ruling spirit. There were several things to be accomplished in order to make the prospect of camp-life more endurable. The bodies of the dead were to be dragged away and buried. A mule and three or four Wachitas performed this duty. Then, upon investigation, it was found that all the wounded Wachitas were able to bear transportation back to their village, which was but half a day's journey. These were hurried off, escorted by the well ones, who were to see them safely home, and to return the following day, with such poor supplies as their miserable settlement afforded—dried meat, green-corn and other vegetables, salt, powder, etc. They were also instructed to kill, if possible, some game on the way back, that fresh meat might be had to make broth for the wounded Spaniard.

Four Indians remained to do such service as was required, principally to act as scouts and guards. This part of the business being disposed of, and the cavalcade of wounded Wachitas having moved slowly away, Buell turned to his friend with a chuckle of satisfaction.

"Mighty glad to get rid of them patients. Don't love to nuss red-skins, though I s'pose they're humans, like the rest of us. Now we'll be nice and quiet—have the snuggest little camp here, ye ever saw, before noon. Firstly, we'll fix up some kind of a tent over that sick man; we'll make it big enough to keep the sun off him and that poor gal. I'll set them lazy Injuns to cuttin' three or four poles; and I guess we can raise a couple o' blankets extra. I'm willin' to do without mine."

"How do you think the señor seems, this morning?" asked Louis.

"He promises well. I reckon he'll hold out. But it's like he'll have a raging fever afore night. If I only had a little quinine, now, I'd snap my fingers at the fever, though."

"We'll have to depend on hydropathic treatment—we've plenty of cold water."

"Yes, and it's a blessin' of the first quality. I've put lots o' patients through that course. I like to see 'em squirm. But I'd give a good round sum for a few doses of the reg'lar Peruvian bitter jist now."

"Perhaps the señor has a medicine-chest."

"There! that's the idea! Why didn't I think of it. Go and ask the gal, Louis."

His friend did not understand with what reluctance Louis performed this commission. He had not addressed Mariquita directly, during the night. Now that fate had thrown them together under such circumstances, it was evident that some sort of communication must be established. Still believing her guilty of the worst inconstancy and duplicity, regarding himself as the wronged party, he steeled himself against the pity and passion which he felt. To treat her as a stranger was the only course to which he could trust himself. In the attempt to be simply indifferent, he overdid the thing; his voice was like ice, when he approached, asking—

—"Madame, if she knew whether there were any medicines among the señor's stores."

The dark eyes were lifted to his with a gaze as full and cold.

"Yes, there was quinine. She would find it."

He took her place, while she went to the luggage in search of the medicine. The sick man's eyes fixed themselves searchingly on the hunter's face; he seemed to wish to speak, and Louis bent his head close to his lips.

"If I should die, be good to her. She is rich and can repay any trouble or expense. But you look like a man of honor, and it is to your honor that I trust her."

"She will be safe with us, and protected as if she were our sister. Don't excite yourself over such thoughts, señor. We are going to make a well man of you."

"Do you know, I liked you, strangely well, from the first moment I saw you. I love you already; you are very good," murmured the señor.

Louis placed his hand over the patient's mouth, shaking his head—

"You must not even whisper to-day. Be quiet—that is all we ask of you."

Yet the Spaniard's words affected him curiously; this man whom he had hated—he could not hate him *now*, that he was so helpless—had returned this feeling with an involuntary love. Something in the declaration touched him deeply; he resolved to atone for his past hatred by the assiduity with which he would watch and tend this enemy of his. Mariquita he despised—but was the señor to blame?

There was time and opportunity to put his resolution to test. Many days of doubt followed upon the first. The patient hovered between life and death. Unwearied care was constantly required. Buell and Louis kept wateh alternate nights; the girl, wearing thinner and paler, always at her post, except when she snatched an hour's repose during some quiet sleep of the sick man. During that trying period the attachment of the señor to Louis became hourly more apparent; he preferred his presence and assistance to any other, even Mariquita's. The similarity of the ages of the two young men had something to do with this; there was the sympathy of youth between them; then Louis was strong and gentle, tender and firm, one to rely on, while the sensitive sufferer was constantly worrying lest "his sister" should over-exert herself.

Strange it was, yet Louis grew accustomed to hearing the two address each other as brother and sister, yet was still persuaded that it was a fiction kept up to cover some other relation. Hardly strange, either, when we consider from what stand-point his view was taken. If Mariquita had a brother, would he not have been aware of it? Thus they dwelt under a cloud of misapprehension, which one ray of truth might at any moment have dissolved into nothingness. Destiny hurried them along to the final crisis, from one blunder to another.

No outside occurrence disturbed the monotony of their long

bivouac. Through the indefatigable energy of Buell, every aid which the country or the climate could afford was brought to their assistance. In that isolated region no traveler passed. The Comanches, never returning to ascertain what became of the companions they had abandoned, had betaken themselves to other exploits in other fields. That solitude which presses human souls together, closed about the little camp. The invalid formed the central point of interest; all else revolved about him. Patient, weak, grateful, gentle, he lay, slowly consuming with fever, against which youth, an unbroken constitution, pure air, and constant nursing, enabled him to hold his ground. The girl, silent, sad, worn, apparently wholly absorbed in care of her brother; Louis, attentive, discreet, untiring; Buell, active, restless, cheerful, humorous; with the four lazy Indians whom he scolded and drove into excellent servants, who provided wood, kept guard, and went on errands to the distant village, as well as kept the animals in provender —these formed the company.

A great want was felt of fresh meat, as they were now in a portion of the country where game was scarce, and the fiery summer season coming on, making it still more so. The grass was withering up on the *mesa*, and the only palatable water for a great distance in any direction, was the little rivulet which trickled from the rock, to cool and refresh the camp. The Wachitas had been out hunting two or three times, but had returned empty-handed; as Buell conjectured, they were so afraid of Comanches as to have lingered near the camp, making a feint of having been off in search of buffalo and antelope. An antelope and several birds had been shot, on the ground, at different times, as they approached to drink of the water, but the supply thus obtained was precarious.

"I wish to goodness I had somethin' to make broth of to-day," exclaimed Buell to Louis, at nearly the close of the second week. "His fever's broke at last—clean gone! His skin is cool and moist, his eyes natural—but he's powerful weak. He *must* be fed up, or kept up, some way, or he'll sink, as sure as shootin'. Thar's plenty o' rice, but that hain't got the constituents in it to make blood. If I had four or five pounds of nice, juicy beef, I'd be fixed. Buffalo-steaks would do for tea—or birds, on a pinch. I believe

I'll send two o' them Injuns to the village to buy a cow; but they can't get back with her before to-morrow night, and time is valuable. One of us had better start off, and see if something can't be scared up."

"Oh, let me go," cried Louis, "it will rest me to get away from camp a little while. My horse, too, is suffering from want of exercise. I'll take a swoop across the plain, and be back, before night, with something."

"Better take an Injun or two with you. The Comanches might gobble you up, and nobody ever be the wiser."

"I'd like to know how much good a Wachita or two would do me. No, thank you, I prefer to go alone. My confidence is in my steed. I shall avoid the mountains, as there I might fall into an ambuscade, but on Tempest's back, on the open plain, I defy the whole horde of red-skins. I'd like a race with a thousand of them."

The sun was just rising when Louis mounted his horse and rode away.

"I can't bear to let you go, even for such a little time," murmured the pale-faced señor, whose olive-skin had lost every tinge of a warmer color, and looked sickly and wan enough, as Louis had bent over him to say good-by for the next few hours.

"I sally forth in your service; so you must not complain," was the gay reply—nevertheless the black eyes of the patient filled with tears as he looked after the strong, manly figure of his new friend.

"Oh, that I could be well, like that, again," he sighed.

With weapons in excellent order, a canteen of water slung at his belt, and enough provisions for his noon lunch stowed in one of his pockets, Louis dashed up onto the table-land above the gully, just as the sunrise had turned the dew of the plains into a world of diamonds. Tempest was so full of spirits, after his long tethering, that in less skillful hands he would have been unmanageable. But to his rider it only added to the charm of the ride, that the animal he bestrode was so full of life and power, that his nerves tingled resentfully at the idea of control. Louis let him have his way, and he darted off like a bird over the level stretches. Solitude everywhere. The first hour not a sign of life was visible—

not a wing specked the blue ether, nor a foot tracked the parching plain. The hunter began to fear that game was not so plentiful as he had imagined. Checking his horse's speed, he rode more leisurely, to and fro, looking sharply in every direction.

Presently he thought he descried, far away to the south, something moving along the horizon like a small herd of buffaloes. They were between him and the encampment. He knew that it was rare, but not impossible, for these animals to be upon the plains at this season of the year, and conjectured that they were in search of water, in which case they would be likely to run their necks into danger from the ready bullets of Buell, for they would be brought straight to the camp by that instinct which enables them to trace out the springs to their foundation. He rode a little to the east, so as to be to the windward side, desiring to come down upon them as unexpectedly as possible. This could hardly be successfully accomplished, as he would be in full sight long before he came in rifle-range of them; but he expected, if he failed to overtake them himself, to drive them into the vicinity of the camp, where others would have a chance of a shot at them.

Having got to the windward he urged his horse into a gentle gallop, sweeping gallantly down upon the supposed herd. Instead of breaking and running wildly from him, as he expected, he was surprised to see it turn and rush directly toward him.

Buffaloes!—hardly. He drew rein and gave a searching glance at the approaching objects, now growing plainly visible across the lessening distance. Comanches?—yes! all men, all well mounted and armed—a regular war-party! And they had seen him, and were swooping down upon him with fierce exultation, certain that one white man's life should partially repay them for the mortifying defeat experienced a fortnight previous.

As soon as he became assured of this disagreeable fact, Louis wheeled his horse, and sped away. Whither, he did not have the opportunity to decide. He only knew that the immense plain was before him, and the Comanches behind, and that they were *between* him and the little valley camp.

"Now, Tempest, brave fellow, it is for you to decide

whether I shall be a live or a dead man this day," he said, stooping and patting the superb neck of the haughty animal he bestrode.

His trust was in his horse, for brave, even to recklessness, as he was, accustomed to all the dangers of his present mode of life, he had no faith in a personal encounter with twenty or more red devils, whose weapons, in all probability, were equal to his own, whose skill and endurance were proverbial. He had the advantage of a good start; his one chance lay in the strength of his horse, which, should it hold out longer than theirs, would keep him in the advance, and enable him to outrun them, or tire them out; but, should Tempest fail him, in his emergency, he knew well that his scalp would grace some saddle-bow before an hour had passed. Away, then, Tempest—do your prettiest. The horse's intelligence was something marvelous. He had scented danger to his master, in the instant's pause before they changed their course. As if he recognized the enmity of the pack swooping toward them, he gave a short, shrill neigh of defiance, the trumpet-blast of battle which told that he was ready for the charge; and, as his rider wheeled, and patting him, spoke as he did, he shot off, like an arrow from the bow, straight and swift across the level stretch.

It was glorious, the ease and speed with which he flew away. Louis saw the earth glide beneath him like a sea, and felt the air almost cut his face; he grew exhilarated with the rapid motion, his pulse and color rose, his eyes shone—he began to feel as if there was nothing under the sun more delightfully arousing and exciting than a race across the plains with the Comanches.

Onward galloped his horse, steadily and with such ease that the immense power he was putting forth was scarcely apparent. Occasionally Louis would half turn in the saddle, casting a keen look behind him. There they always were, about the same distance in the rear, those red devils, hovering like a low cloud along the plain, neither failing nor gaining upon him. The trust of a Comanche warrior is in his war-steed: there were a score of animals behind Tempest, worthy rivals for the honors of the turf. With the exception of an occasional gully to leap, there were no obstacles in the way.

On went pursuers and pursued. The hot sun of June was rising higher in the heavens, though the morning breeze had not entirely ceased to blow. Mile after mile fled beneath his horse's feet, like waves beneath an ocean-ship; and Louis could not but think, through all the thrill of the hour, that he was riding further and further from camp, and, when the race was over, would have all that weary distance to retrace. No matter; or, at all events, inevitable. This was a flight that admitted of no deviation; it was a trial for his life; the question was, whether or not his scalp should give grace to the girdle of some exultant savage.

Louis had persuaded himself that he was tired of life. Especially during the strange, peculiar experience of the past few days—when, self-deluded into a causeless misery, he had watched the devotion of the woman he loved, to another, and had proven his own magnanimity by his gentle, devoted tenderness to his rival—had he said to himself many times that life was an intolerable burden which he would gladly cast aside. But now, that these racing Indians were behind him, ready and anxious to relieve him of the load, he became conscious that he was quite willing to carry it a little longer. There is nowhere so rapid a cure for such morbid fancies, as in an experience like this which was now testing his misanthropy. Still, if he had had time to philosophize, doubtless the young gentleman would have persuaded himself that it was not a love of life which was at the bottom of his efforts, but a hatred of the Comanches! It might be pleasant to die (under some circumstances), but pride and delicacy revolted at the thought of death at the hands of those painted devils! So, Louis urged Tempest to do his prettiest as faithfully as if life were not a faded weed, only fit to be trampled upon.

On went pursuers and pursued. Looking behind him now, Louis could perceive that he was gaining on the main body of warriors, but that four of them had left the band in the background, and were slowly, though steadily, gaining upon him. He had not believed there was a horse west of the Mississippi that could distance Tempest in a fair trial, yet those four more than held their own.

Four! well, four were less than twenty. Louis felt for the haft of his knife, and to see that his revolver was in its place.

All right. He had carefully cleaned and loaded his rifle before leaving camp; all the barrels of his revolver were in order. Yet he knew that the creatnres behind him had, at least, good rifles; and that they had the advantage in point of attack, as well as in numbers, by coming at him from the rear —also, that while engaged with them, even if momentarily successful, the rest of the band would have time to come up. No! there was no use thinking of risking a battle.

"Tempest, you must do better still. Bravo! you do finely, but not well enough for this occasion," he muttered. "You'll hear their hoofs behind you in less than ten minutes, if you don't exert yourself, old boy." He chirruped to the horse, striking him smartly on the neck with his hand, half lovingly, half impatiently. It was well that a long season of rest had put Tempest in his best condition; he had been so fiery, when first mounted, as to be almost rebellious against his owner's will; now this large stock of fire and strength was to be drawn upon to the utmost; with a low trumpet he responded to his rider's words, who could feel the thrill of his nerves through all that powerful frame, as with a longer, more magnificent bound he galloped forward.

On went pursuers and pursued. The fierce sun began to beat down, until the plain seemed to swim in the undulations of the heated atmosphere. Two hours the terrible, unflagging race had been kept up. Louis turned again to look: the four red devils were close upon his track, but the rest of the pack were entirely lost to sight. It seemed that Tempest could hear the beating of pursuing hoofs, although they were inaudible to his rider, for the foam flew from his mouth, he rolled his blazing eyes back to take note of his enemies, bent neck and head straight forward, and pressed onward with tremendous bounds. As Louis turned his head, instantly all four of the savages disappeared behind their horses. They were already near enough to notice his motions, and to put themselves on the defensive, though they seemed not willing to risk a shot themselves, probably wishing to approach so close as to make sure of their aim. Knowing the peculiar method of their warfare, the white hunter felt how hopeless it would be to attempt to destroy any of them, riding, as they were, in his rear, and able to make a bulwark of their steeds at any instant. Still,

to wound or kill their horses would be as useful as to hit the men themselves. His rifle was of the very best; and, as the danger of a shot from them became more imminent, with a cry to Tempest, urging him on, he turned completely round in his saddle, his back to the horse's head, drew the weapon from his shoulder and took as quiet, deliberate aim, as ever he took in his life, the smooth, powerful gallop of the animal not at all hindering him. As he expected, each dusky form dropped from the saddle, but his aim was at the breast of the foremost horse, which was hardly a length in advance of the others, so splendidly did the four ride on in the emulous race. Deliberately he fired, and, through the light wreath of smoke which jutted from his rifle's mouth, he saw the horse leap up, stagger, and fall. It did not appear that the three others gave even a look at their worsted companion—they only drove the goad into their animals' sides, and swept forward more threateningly. But Tempest was now at the very hight and crown of his power; he did not slacken, he seemed even to increase his speed, and the maddened Comanches could not approach so as to return the fire. Louis would have fired again, but an instinct warned him to turn and see what was before him. He was not any too soon in this movement. Before him, cracking the parched earth of the plain, like the rift of an earthquake, was one of those *arroyas*, or dry beds of streams, something like that in which their camp was located, except that this was narrower, with perpendicular sides, while that of the camp was precipitous on one side only. This was more like a fissure made by the intense heat, than like the bed of a river, although, in reality, it was such a bed. Louis scanned it with alarm as he rapidly approached; it was too steep down to think of descending or sheltering himself in it, while yet it seemed too wide to venture a leap. However, there was no time for mental debate; death certainly was behind, if not before him. He left it to the instinct of his horse. If Tempest declined the risk of a leap, then he would turn, dash suddenly toward his enemies, disable as many as possible, and die gloriously, if alone. One thought of the past, and the future, one memory of Mariquita—he drew the reins firmly in, shouted to his steed, a cry like the blast of a bugle, and they were at the edge of the *arroya*. The next instant he felt himself borne

through the air like one upon wings—the next, and with a light shock, horse and rider had touched ground, safe on the far side of the ravine, and Tempest stumbled on, gallantly still, but as if the effort had shaken and weakened him.

Again Louis turned to see the three Comanches hovering on the edge of the *arroya.* In vain they yelled and beat their horses; the noble animals were wise enough to know themselves too much exhausted for this final desperate effort, and stood trembling and cowering, refusing to attempt it. Again the rifle of Louis resounded, and another horse staggered and fell sheer down the bank, his rider just saving himself by springing from his saddle as he fell. This finished the chase. The dismounted savage took to his heels, and the two others, with a yell of rage and disappointment, wheeled their horses, picked him up, and rode away, leaving the field to the white hunter.

While his enemies were receding in the distance, and he trying to realize the fact that they had abandoned him to victory, Louis felt the sudden trembling and gasping of Tempest, who yet endeavored to stagger on; he dropped the reins and sprung from the saddle.

"Poor fellow; noble friend! I'm afraid I've killed you," he murmured.

With a shiver, Tempest sunk on his knees and threw himself on his side. At first Louis feared he had broken a blood vessel in the strain of that mighty leap, but he soon satisfied himself that it was only extreme exhaustion. He looked about him. It was high noon. Cloudless, brassy, burning, the sky arched over them; around them was the arid plain, not a tree for shelter, nor a drop of water for cooling. The master sat down beside the apparently dying friend who had carried him through a terrible crisis. The gentle love in the half-closed eyes of Tempest touched him like a reproach.

"What can I do for you?" he sadly asked. "At least, I will share with you the morsel that I have."

From the small—frightfully small—store of water in his canteen, he moistened the parching throat of his brute comrade. Presently he dipped a biscuit in the water and gave it in morsels—then another, and a third—until but one biscuit and a meager draught of water was left for himself. He

drank the few precious drops, for he was very thirsty, and nibbling at his hard cracker stood up and looked about to find where he might be. He could see nothing but that stretch of arid desert. He had relied upon the Wachita mountains, as a landmark, to guide him back to camp. But either he had ridden an incredible distance in that mad race, or the hot, undulatory waves of the air, rising and moving like smoke, acted as a vail between him and the horizon—no mountains were visible, no distant grove of trees, promising water—he was lost in a fiery and desolate region, his faithful companion already overdone, and himself feeling severely the effects of fatigue, excitement, and thirst.

Even had he known precisely what course to steer, it would be impossible, should Tempest recover sufficiently to perform the journey, for the horse again to cross the *arroya* unless some more accessible point should be found, and to search for this might take them many weary miles.

Should Tempest die (and he resolved not to abandon him unless he did), then there would be a march of thirty or forty miles across the plains, to be taken by himself, with no likelihood of his coming upon a drop of water in all that distance. The very thought of these things parched his throat; while above him, cloudless and cruel, the persistent sun shot down his pitiless arrows of molten gold.

"Ay, Tempest, I'm afraid we're in trouble still," muttered the young man, sitting wearily beside his horse, after completing his anxious survey.

CHAPTER X.

THREE DARK DAYS.

"This is bad, Dick, monstrous bad!" spoke Amos Buell, as the sunset of that same day began to deepen into twilight.

Man and dog had climbed the bluff, and were straining their eyes to search the horizon for some sign of the return of the friend who had left them in the morning; the latter with ears pricked forward, and an attitude of solicitude every bit

as intent and intense as that of his companion. Scarcely the flying of a bird to its distant nest disturbed the solitude—that solitude of those vast western plains, so impressive in its majesty.

"I don't know what's to be done," continued Buell, despondingly; "it's too late to set out on a search, and 'time is money,' as I used to say when I was a-sellin' clocks to the farmers' wives. Somethin' serious has happened or he would have been hum hours ago. He's been gobbled up by the Comanches, sure as shootin'. What's your opinion, Dick?"

The dog answered by a melancholy whine, which had also something reproachful in it; for he had asked to accompany his master when he set out on his hunt, but had been sent back, much to his displeasure. Louis had intended to gallop far and wide, feeling the spirit of unrest upon him, and he had thought Dick might as well be in camp, doing duty there, as following his erratic path; so had driven him back. The dog now reflected on this conduct, evidently fancying that if he had accompanied his master, no evil could have befallen him. Yet, if Dick, in his egotism, could have known it, he saved his skin by staying behind; he was no match for Tempest in a race, and would have fallen a victim to the Indians, without doubt.

"Or if he ain't," pursued the other, musingly, "he's lost himself, which is about as bad; for there ain't a thing to eat nor drink off there, I'm afraid. It's been a hot day—a reg'lar scorcher; and there won't a drop o' dew fall to-night. The sky's as brazen as Kitty Jones' face, and the air as dry as Tim's gullet, when there's whisky 'round. I never felt more oneasy in my born days, or more unsettled what steps to take. I've took an uncommon likin' to that young man; he's wound himself 'round my feelin's like a bean round a pole—and, unless I'm mistaken, that purty young lady down there's in the same fix. Hallo! here she comes now; didn't I tell you, Dick? It don't take a telescope to find how the land lies in that quarter, as I used to say when I sailed a fishin' smack into Nantucket. Wal, señorita, it looks dubious."

Mariquita had climbed the bluff and stood by his side, her large, bright eyes seeming to contract with the intensity with which she scanned the plain; her cheek was deadly pale; she

endeavored to appear calm, but her lips would tremble as she asked:

"Do you see nothing of him?"

"Not the faintest twinkle of him, miss."

"What do you think has happened?"

Buell, whistling and looking sideways into the pale face, did not answer.

"Do you think those terrible Comanches have killed him?" she asked, in a sharp whisper, laying her hand on his arm.

"Laws, I hope not," with affected carelessness. "He's lost his way, it's likely, or he's taken a freak to scare us, for the sake of givin' us a new sensation in this dull camp. He's a streaky fellow, full of his whims."

A sigh broke from the lips of Mariquita—"full of his whims"—perhaps his love for her had been a whim, his sudden desertion, another; she was the victim of his caprice. Why could she not scorn him as he deserved? Why did she not hate him for his treachery? Why, oh, God! why did she still love him? She asked herself these questions, still clutching the arm of Amos Buell, and staring off, eagerly, over the darkening plain.

"What's that?" she presently asked, pointing to the dim verge.

"Sorry to say it's only a little cloud, miss. There! you see, it is spreading—only a little cloud, that don't even mean rain. But you mustn't feel so troubled, my dear miss, indeed, you mustn't. He may come tearing into camp, any minute, and then we'll all laugh at our fright. He's plucky, Louis is, and if he made up his mind to game, he wouldn't come back without it, if he stayed till midnight. He means the señor shall have something nice for his supper."

"Ah, yes! it is for my brother he has periled himself. I can not forget that," murmured Mariquita.

"They seem to take to each other, these two young men, as if they were brothers," remarked Buell. "I like to see it, when they're both warm-hearted. When men like each other it's a good symptom. Yet, I'm a leetle sorry Louis went out to-day, since it's turned out so unnecessary. Them Wachitas brought that cow in, just in time. Lordy, but she's tough! Howsomever, she'll make good beef-tea, for which

we'll be thankful. 'Pears to me the señor's better already. This is decidedly his most hopeful day. He's got nothin' in the world to do now but to eat, and get strength—easy business compared to what he's been at, señorita."

"And he owes it all to you and Mr. Louis," cried the young girl, bursting into tears.

"Fiddlestick! s'posin' he does. I'll bring in a bill as long as a Texas per-rarie when I've got him cured—for board, lodgin', nussin,' medicine, and all the extras, if you go to bein' too grateful about it. If there's any thing I can't bear, it's bein' thanked, señorita—please remember *that*. But I'm right glad to see you cry. You've be'n too pale the last few hours—too much 'tension on the strings, ye see—and you'll feel better after you've had a good cry. It's as good as nervine tea."

Dick rubbed his nose against her hand, attesting his sympathy. Now that she had once given way to her long-controlled emotions—emotions which had been gathering for days—they were beyond her mastery. Sinking down behind the dog, she clasped him about the neck, laid her head against him, and sobbed as if the storm of excitement would never subside. Buell watched her in silence; he was too discreet to interfere at first; but when he thought she had cried long enough he sung out in his most good-natured voice:

"Dick, you're a lucky dog! Jemima! I'd be willin' to be a dog myself, to have a purty cre'ture hugging me like that."

Mariquita quickly rose, half laughing and half indignant; but the next moment her anxiety returned.

"It is growing so dark," she said.

"Yes—no use standin' here staring at nothing. We'll go back to our patient, and tell him the news. And, in the mornin', if Louis ain't on hand, I'll get out a search-warrant and get Dick, here, to serve it on him."

They turned to descend the ledge; the dog seemed very unwilling to accompany them, looking wistfully over the level stretch, and whining. The Yankee finally took him by the collar and led him into camp. Pedro was excited and restless; so much so as to incur the risk of bringing back the fever; he continually lamented the absence of the young hunter, and the fact that it was to provide nourishment for

him, that he had gone forth. His sister, who knew him so well—how affectionate, passionate, fervid were his feelings, and how warmly they had been bestowed on Louis—saw the necessity of controlling all evidence of her own anxiety, and using all her power to tranquilize the patient. She succeeded so well, that after an hour or two he fell asleep, a gentle slumber which she felt was giving life to him.

None of the other dwellers in the little camp of the *arroya* rested that night—unless it might be the sleepy Wachitas. It was the darkest night since that first one which had witnessed the formation of the camp. Now, anxiety gnawed at the hearts of those who feared for the fate of Louis, as they had then trembled over the critical state of Pedro.

Buell, stalking here and there, vainly affecting to be at ease, while starting at every breath of wind or rustle of leaf, waited impatiently for the dawn, that he might begin the search. Mariquita, sitting inside the tent, listened too; and when certain that Pedro was too profoundly at rest to miss her, stole out, and stood beside the door.

"Why in the name of Sancho Panza don't you go to bed, señorita?" he inquired. "Do you think it's going to do that young man any service, one way or t'other, for you to set up like a night-owl?

"I am not sleepy, Mr. Buell," pleaded Mariquita, stepping toward him. "What do you propose to do about Mr. Grason, if he doesn't return by daylight?"

"Mr. who?" queried the Yankee.

"I meant Louis, of course," said the girl, quickly. "See, there's the moon. It will soon be nearly as light as day."

"I s'pose you'd like me to start right off 'by moonlight alone,' as the song says. So I would, if I had any clue. But my only hope is to keep his trail, and the moonlight, though tolerable powerful, won't do for that, on that hard-baked ground. No, miss, I reckon I'm as sot to do what I can as you could wish, but 'the more haste the wuss speed,' is a favorite proverb of mine. I should admire to start this minute, Providence permittin', but Providence don't permit."

"How do you intend to proceed?"

"I shall go on horseback, with a good lot o' wittals, and as much water as I can stow without lumberin' the ship. I

shall take one o' them Wachitas along, and plenty o' gunpowder; and Dick, by all means, for I depend on that cre'tur' to keep the trail a good deal better than I could without him. Speakin' of Dick, I'd like to know where in thunder—begging your pardon, señorita—that dog is! Come to think of it, I hain't seen him the last two hours. I'll bet ten to one he's gone off on an independent search for himself. Dick!" whistling and calling, but no dog appeared.

"May a wagon run over his tail, if he's served me that trick!" continued the speaker, very much disturbed. "I relied on Dick. If he finds his master, he can't do him any good; while if he stayed for orders, like a well-disciplined dog, he might have showed me the way. He's deserted the camp, that's dead certain; he shall be tried by court-martial, and shot if I can catch him. So! I reckon we'll have to get along without him."

"Every thing goes wrong," murmured the girl.

"Pshaw—mustn't say that, señorita. Some things are right—and some, left. If the young man should make his appearance to-morrow, safe and sound, and, hearing how much interest you had taken in his fate, should reward you with his hand and heart, I s'pose 'twould all be right, eh, señorita?"

"You know not what you jest about. Such a thing would be more impossible than for the sun to fall—you must not speak so again, Mr. Buell."

She said this so gravely and proudly, that the Yankee thrust his hands in his pockets, and puckered up his mouth, staring down at her half angrily.

"Humph! I forgot that she was a haughty little minx, heiress to ever so many gold mines, and the Lord knows what," he thought. "She reckons Mr. Louis to be only a hunter, a half-savage, without name or fortune—as if any one couldn't see, with half an eye, that he's high bred and high learned, and got a romance about him enough to set fifty girls crazy! Gosh! it's nigh upsot me! I'd give my interest in Red river railroad shares to know what sent that young gentleman away from home, to rough it out here. I have done my purtiest to find out, but he's as close about it, as the lock is to a trunk,"—adding aloud—"didn't mean no offense, señorita. We old chaps like to joke with the young folks.

Howsumever, a lover like him wouldn't be sneezed at. He's as good as the best, I'm certain, if anybody could only find out who and what he is. Somethin' mysterious about Louis, señorita. I guess he's been jilted, and is tryin' wild life to cure his disapp'intment. Don't you think there's some secret history of that kind about him?"

"Possibly—but what is that to me?"

"Oh, nuthin'. Only mystery usually makes a person more interestin'. I ain't ashamed to own I've tried to find out Louis' history. In fact, I've asked him, p'int blank, and he refused to tell me. So, of course, there's somethin' wrong."

Mariquita's heart beat wildly. Had the light been greater, her companion would have seen her agitation.

"I believe I will try to sleep, Mr. Buell."

"That's a little more sensible. I'll try, also, to catch a nap; then up, kindle a fire, cook a dish of coffee, pack my wallet, and off."

She returned to the tent, while he threw himself on the ground, with a leather-bag for a pillow, and in a few moments was asleep. Earnest to serve his friend to the best of his ability, he resolved, as a precaution against future fatigue, to take some repose, and for him to will a thing was generally to accomplish it. Thus he succeeded in taking a couple of hours' rest, despite his real anxiety. At the end of that time he sprung up, roused the guard, nodding as usual, and while the Wachita whom he selected to accompany him was feeding and saddling two of the best horses, he was making his breakfast, packing a bag with food, filling a leather-jug and two canteens with water, and loading his rifles. By the time the light had broadened so as to give them a clear path, Buell, and his follower, were on the way.

Mariquita came out of her tent to see them off.

"I leave you Commanding-General of the forces, until my return," said the Yankee to her; "you'll be lonesome here, but I hope you'll be safe. Keep them lazy rascals on the look-out against a surprise. I've loaded every weapon on the premises, and you must keep 'em nigh your hand. I know you're a brave girl, and can shoot a red-skin when it's necessary. So I'll leave you in the care of Providence —trust to luck, and keep your powder dry. That's right—

don't cry. Take good care of the patient, and dose him well with beef-tea. Hopin' and prayin' to return with good tidings, by sunset, or before, I bid you good-by."

With a flourish of his big hand, Buell rode away. Mariquita ran up the ledge, and watched him as long as he remained in sight. Lonesome! He said truly that she would be lonesome, but he little guessed the terrible desolation which seemed to her to settle over the camp, as he disappeared. So helpless, so solitary, so deserted! with only three thieving and untrustworthy Wachitas for her protection—and Louis gone—forever!

"Forever."

She whispered the word, looking about vacantly on the rosy sky and brown plain. She had thought that he was nothing to her but a reminder of injustice and cruelty; but now that she feared some frightful fate for him, there was a curious revulsion in her feelings.

What if Pedro should die? What if Buell never came back?

All dreary things seemed possible on that dreadful and desolate morning.

She felt an impulse to rush off over the wide plains, where, or to what ending, she cared not—only to find refuge from this silent oppression. But thoughts of Pedro restrained her.

Slowly she went back to the little valley camp. Slowly the slow hours rolled away. It was a day that prolonged itself indefinitely. She cooked little delicacies for the patient, and tried to find work to do. But all she could invent filled scarcely one of the endless hours. Many times, even in the heat of noon, she climbed the bluff to scan the plain. All was silence and desolation.

But, if the solitude was dreadful by day it grew positively awful by night. For the red, fierce sun did at last sink; the long twilight stole treacherously over the landscape; the deep night came—to bring no return of those who had set forth that morning, neither of him who had rode away from them the previous day so full of health and ardor.

Pedro fretted for "his dear friend," "his beloved Louis," "his brother;" and it was well for Mariquita that he began to show symptoms of returning health in that increased irritability which made many demands upon her attention. However, she did not take this disquietude for so favorable a token

as it was; she was alarmed lest his fever should return in full force; and thus anxiety for him was blended with the cold fear and suspense which lay like a dead weight on her heart.

There was plenty of room for startling apprehensions in the circumstances which surrounded her. The chances were many, that even the good, coarse, humorous, but comforting and reliable Yankee, might never return. What claim had she upon him? Perhaps when he found Louis—if he ever did—the two would pursue their original plans, leaving the camp to its fate. Pedro so weak—she so helpless. A dizzy circle of thoughts like these kept turning in her brain, as the second day of Buell's absence arose and rolled into its meridian; she was actually alarmed lest her reason should give way with her fortitude.

CHAPTER XI.

DICK.

Louis sat a long time beside his horse, who was too much exhausted to rise. The unshadowed sun beat down on them until the man felt himself in danger of sun-stroke. His eager eye scanning the horizon on all sides, saw nothing to reveal to him the direction he ought to take. However, there was one thing he could do—follow back on the trail made by himself and the Comanches, which he judged to be about on as straight a line for the camp as any that could be chosen. In this he might run some risk of being waylaid by them, but there was a comforting thought in the fact, that no ambush could be formed by them, as the whole route was perfectly open and exposed.

"It'll never do to waste time this way, Tempest, if we are to get home on our present stock, which consists of one piece of salt dried beef. Yet I fear you won't rally, old fellow, without something to drink. I'd give a bucket of dollars, if I had them, for a bucket of water. Lie still, my brave boy, while I descend the gully and look about; there may still be a little water there."

When he saw that his master was moving away, Tempest made an effort to struggle to his feet, but did not succeed. His pitiful eyes seemed to speak a request not to be [illegible].

"Oh, I'm coming back with a hat full of water presently!" said the young man, hopefully.

Retracing the way back to the *arroya*, he was soon wandering down the sandy bed, where once had been a deep stream, looking for signs of moisture, where, by digging in the sand, he might still find water. He looked in vain. Not a drop trickled from the dusty bluffs on either side, nor was there even a little pool or hint of underground springs in the bottom. It was cooler there than on the plain; the whole course was in shadow from the steep walls, and the winds rushed through with a loud, refreshing murmur. He then searched for a less abrupt declivity, so that he might get his horse over the ravine as soon as he should be able to move.

"Perhaps Tempest will discover water where I can not; they say the instinct of animals is wonderful in such matters."

Hoping this, but beginning to be depressed by serious forebodings, Louis found a spot at which he thought his horse might cross the *arroya;* he then went back and found Tempest already on his feet and coming toward him, with a faint whinny of delight. Carefully as a person, but still somewhat feebly, the animal made his way down the steep bank.

"Sniff around, my friend, and tell us where the water lies," said Louis; but, though he led his companion a long distance up and down the bed of the vanished stream, he gave no signs of making the important discovery.

"If that's the case, every hour lost here may be the fatal one."

Urging his horse up the opposite side, he started by the trail of the four animals who had come thus far. The dead steed of the Comanche lay stiff beneath the sun; the owner had not paused to take possession of its trappings, neither could Louis avail himself of these trophies, for Tempest, as yet, could not bear his master's weight. Man and horse walked slowly forward; and, as the palpitating vail of heat lifted and the sun sunk lower, Louis saw, afar off, faint, like a scarcely visible cloud, the peak of the Wachita mountains, which he had designed to use as a landmark. This gave him liberty to press forward without the trouble of keeping the trail; but he was still obliged to walk, as Tempest was trembling and unsteady in his gait. They must have come an amazing distance during that tremendous gallop. The mountains might be thirty miles, they might be fifty, or more—he could not judge.

As long as there was any light to detect that little cloud against the sky, he hurried on. Then the question was, whether to attempt to proceed through the darkness. He must; it was imperatively necessary. He was tortured by an increasing thirst; and he knew that his horse suffered similar pangs by his short, gasping breathing. Knowing that neither could hold out while he walked those many miles, he finally mounted, conscious of the cruelty of hurrying the trembling animal, yet conscious, likewise, that the safety of both demanded it. It was evident that Tempest, magnanimous by nature, made a noble effort to follow out his wishes and to appear proud of his burden; he broke into a gentle trot, and with a brief show of his old fire, tossed his mane in the glowing starlight.

"Bravo! bravo! we shall see home yet!" murmured the young man, as five or six miles of ground were passed over in good time. "The further we go to-night the less we shall have to suffer from to-morrow's sun. Aha! what's this? trembling and staggering again."

With another desperate rally Tempest recovered himself, trotted forward more rapidly than before, then suddenly stopped, shivering through all his frame; his rider had just time to dismount, when he sunk on his knees and fell over.

"It's no use—you've killed yourself for me," murmured Louis, the tears starting in his eyes, as he knelt, too, patting the dying steed, and talking affectionately to him as if he was a child. He began to apprehend that Tempest had injured himself internally at the time of that mighty and magnificent leap which had saved his master. This was probably the case, as thirst and fatigue would hardly have exhausted that powerful form so quickly. For the next two hours he continued to breathe with great difficulty, every gasp wringing his owner's heart; then there was a long shiver, a sound almost like a human groan, and Tempest was dead!

The hunter sat some time beside the body of his brute friend, feeling an acute grief at his loss. It seemed to him ungrateful to leave him there, unburied, for the birds to prey upon; but the increasing sense of thirst and hunger which tortured him, overcame all such nice sentiment. The love of life and the instinct to preserve it is strong in us all. Quite certain that he was walking in the right direction, and even that he

could still make out the faint outlines of the Wachita peak against the starlight, he braced himself to extraordinary exertions, well aware that the burning sun of the morrow would increase his sufferings, while it decreased his ability to travel.

Morning came. He had walked many miles, and the mountains were still before him, proving that he had not gone astray; and yet they looked no nearer than on the previous day. How far, how unapproachable they grew! He pressed steadily forward, forcing himself to think of every thing but of the burning craving which tore his dry throat—of his mother, his selfishness in going from her as he had—of his dear home in New York, with its circle of comforts and friends—of Mariquita—and ever through all the images which he called up, his thirst grew and grew; and the sun, like a brazen face to mock him, stood over him; the morning breeze died away; the atmosphere grew wavering in the heat, and nowhere was any shade, any coolness, any promise of water. His eyes were hot, his feet blistered, his knees weak and trembling; but the courage of manhood was still strong within him, and he pressed forward, toward that discouraging, dissolving point against the brilliant sky.

It was noon, and past noon, when the physical powers of the young hunter finally compelled his strong will to succumb. Gasping, tottering, scorched and blasted, he could no longer force one foot before the other. He was about to sink upon the parched earth in a sort of vague bewilderment, no longer striving against fate, when his foot stumbled, and he rolled into a little gully, only five or six feet deep, formed, like the others, by the drying-up of the little stream which filled it earlier in the season. The shock aroused him—he looked eagerly about him, digging in the sand with his fingers, hoping for a little moisture at least, against which he could lay his fevered lips. Nothing! Nothing! He drew from his pocket a morsel of salt dried beef. Chewing upon it revived him for a time, but afterward only added to his pangs. It was a little cooler there, in the shadow of the bank; and, anyhow, he had not strength to crawl up on to the plain. He felt that he was about to die. For a little time his mind remained calm and clear. He wondered if Amos Buell would search for him, and find his body; he even thought, with deep interest, of Pedro suffering for the fresh meat which he had not brought him,

wondering if he would sink for the want of it. He thought, too, of Mariquita—of her more than of any thing else. She came to him, and reproached him with the haste with which he had judged her. Sad, solemn, beautiful, she seemed to stand before him, with pathetic eyes and gentle lips, and to say—"Judge not, that ye be not judged." Instantly, as by a flash of the sun into a dark room, he saw how he *might have been* mistaken in his hasty conclusion; that the girl whom he had loved, knowing so little of her family, might have had a brother—and Pedro might really be that brother. All at once, the case was reversed; *she* was the party wronged, *he* the guilty one. Ah! if this *was so!* if he could live to prove it so! if he could stagger to his feet, if only in time to satisfy himself of this, before he died! Die! was he really dying?—he, so young, so strong! With a great effort he raised his head, but it sunk back again; his clear, excited brain began to whirl and swim—he was fast lapsing into delirium.

At this crisis, something cold touched his face; a short, joyful bark rung in his dimmed ears; he unclosed his eyes—Dick, his faithful dog, was licking and caressing him, vainly trying to express the pleasure of his dumb, brute heart. Again Louis rallied. If Dick was here, Buell could not be far away. With a sickly smile, the young man patted the dog, his eyes eagerly searching the space about him.

Poor Dick! he comprehended the emergency. His wild delight at finding his master began to subside. To find him was not enough. He needed help which no dog could give him. As the consciousness of this crept into his canine brain, he suddenly whirled, leaped up the bank and disappeared. In vain Louis waited his return, listened for the sound of voices, hoped for assistance. His delirium returned. It grew to him only one of his many mocking fancies, that Dick had been there! He saw cold, shining water, too—but there was no water. He tasted golden oranges and luscious peaches, but there was no fruit in that desert. Dick had not been there—it was a fever-dream!

The long afternoon slid away, the sun set, the twilight began to darken. How long that afternoon had been Louis knew not—he was lethargic and sinking now. The world, and all therein, was fading away from him, with the sun which faded in the west.

Again he was disturbed.

He thought Mariquita held a silver cup of delicious wine to his lips. He drank and drank—she laughed, and sung to him. Presently his stupor partially rolled away, voices were actually near him—some one was calling his name—some one was wetting his lips with the draught of life. He unclosed his eyes and stared at the homely face which bent above him.

"Buell?" he whispered, doubtfully.

"'Tain't nobody else. You guessed right that time, young man—yes, by Jemima!—and not a minit too soon—no, thank the Lord, and not too late." And with this, rough, lank, cold-blooded, curious Buell, who never seemed to have any too much heart, burst out into a laugh which ended in a sob.

"Now, by all the horses I ever swapped, if this don't beat all—to find myself a-cryin' when I set out to laugh! Wouldn't the folks to hum be astonished to see Amos Buell making such a fool of himself? But the fact is, my friend, when I found you here, I took you for dead—and it's an agreeable surprise to find you alive. Ha! ha! take a drop or two more o' this, Louis. It'll set you up, like windin' up a clock. We'll have you all right, now, in less'n no time."

In half an hour Louis sat up, leaning against the bank; his stupor and bewilderment were gone, though he was very weak.

"How came you to find me?"

"I never should have found you—leastwise until it was quite too late to be of any earthly use to you—if it hadn't been for Dick, here. Dick! bless your soul! (you know I argue that dogs have souls!) where are you?"

The dog was lying at his master's feet, quiet and tired, quite satisfied at the present state of affairs, which did not seem to demand any action on his part.

"You see that dog left me in the lurch, last night, when you didn't get back. He stole off, on his own hook, to hunt you up; and it's my opinion he's been over every inch o' ground you've touched since you started. Wal, I sot off this mornin', but you see he had the start o' me; me, and red-skin here, had made our way to that *arroya*, where you seemed to have dropped in, and where we found a Comanche horse shot by one o' your bullets, and was a-wondering what to do next, when Dick comes tearing up to us, like mad, and takes me by the breeches, and pulls, and seems so determined to have his

way, that I wasn't long a-guessin' he'd come with a message from you. That was about three hours ago. So I told him to trot, and we would follow. He did trot, so fast that our horses had a good time keepin' him in sight. And he brought us here without unnecessary delay. I reckon we'd had a good time getting on the right track, if it hadn't been for Dick. Judging by your symptoms when we arriv', we'd have found you about a day too late to be of any assistance, onless it was to bury you."

Louis' hand rested lovingly on Dick's head.

"How far from camp are we now?"

"About twenty mile. You went about forty-five, if you went to that *arroya*."

"Can we get back to-night?"

"I reckon not. I guess a little feedin' and sleepin' won't hurt you, the next few hours. About three o'clock, we'll mount you on the horse of my red friend here, who will have no objections to a little walk, and we'll be back in camp in time to take a late breakfast with the pretty señorita."

"The pretty señorita" did not have much appetite for breakfast. She was sitting, listlessly, outside the tent door. Her cheeks were pale, there were dark shadows under her eyes, her every attitude and movement betrayed the lassitude of hopeless melancholy. For some moments she had remained motionless, her eyes bent on the ground. Suddenly a loud, cheery voice rung in her ears:

"Good mornin', señorita. Folks to hum? How's your family? We're travelers, hungry and tired, and if you don't keep a hotel, we trust you won't refuse your fellow-cretur's a little breakfast."

Yes, it was Buell. Humorous and careless as ever, here he was, saluting her with a jest, by way of announcing his return.

Who was on the other horse? Not the Wachita?—no—it was Louis! Instantly her heart sprung up, like a flower when some passing foot is lifted from it. She did not pause to ask why he had wronged her—what their present relations were. In the triumphant joy of finding that he was yet alive, every other feeling perished. She sprung forward, held out her arms, her face flushed.

"Louis!"

The next moment he held her on his bosom. They looked in each others' eyes, and the past was forgiven on both sides. Not then was the explanation made, which came a little later. Sacred to the consciousness that each still loved the other remained the first few minutes.

"Whew-w-w!" whistled Amos Buell, thrusting his hands in his pockets, and making good use of his eyes. "This comes of shetting a young man and woman up in a camp together for a couple o' weeks!"

But for once Amos Buell was mistaken. Louis condescended to explain "the mystery" of his life, information of which had been so often desired by his inquisitive friend, during the few days in camp which followed his own convalescence and the marvelously speedy restoration of Señor D'Estanza.

To the ardent and generous soul of Pedro, the discovery that the man he so loved was the lover of his sister, and likely truly to be soon "his brother," was like a draught from some elixir of life. Under the pleasant excitement he rapidly grew strong, so that it was but a brief time before they could resume their journey, which was, however, transposed. The whole party concluded to return to the States, where the marriage of Louis and Mariquita could most properly be consummated, the anxiety of friends relieved, and the lovely bride placed under the shelter of Louis' own home. When he listened to Louis' confession of his jealousy, and of the construction he had put upon the secret meeting of brother and sister in St. Louis, Pedro was indignant for a brief time; but his generosity and affection enabled him soon to wholly and heartily forgive it.

"You have suffered too much, for us to deal severely with you," he said, giving his hand to his new brother, with one of his sparkling smiles. "If Mariquita forgives you, it is all right."

"At least, it was from excess of love, not lack of it, that I erred," said Louis, humbly, and the dark eyes smiling into his did not reproach him.

We will not give the particulars of the homeward journey. It was accomplished in safety; and Amos Buell had the privilege, as a reward for his many friendly services, of giving away the beautiful bride.

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